CAMPUS LEADER AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPUS ADMINISTRATOR ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF CORE-CONTENT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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The implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs) has led to systemwide reform within school districts and campuses regarding how campus leaders support the teachers' collaborative work and continued professional learning. Current research emphasizes the importance of campus administrators cultivating an environment where PLCs can flourish and ensuring that PLC teams have the resources to work effectively. However, campus administrators simply putting these supports in place does not make them effective. This study sought to explore campus leader and teacher perceptions of administrator actions that support PLCs for teachers in core-content subjects at two suburban north Texas high schools. An explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was utilized, and three data collections tools were used: an electronic survey, interviews with campus administrators and teachers, and the analysis of campus and PLC artifacts. Survey data indicated that participating teachers had an overall positive perception of the current campus practices which support PLC teams. Teacher interview data revealed that teachers preferred that campus administrators take a neutral role in PLC team meetings, that administrators ensure PLC teams are meeting the established campus PLC expectations, and that administrators observe the team, listen, and ask questions to help the team. Campus administrators viewed their actions within PLC teams to include listening and questioning, having difficult conversations, and helping teams brainstorm or offering ideas when needed. Teachers and administrators also identified supports for PLC teams they felt were missing. Recommended actions for campus administrators and recommendations for further research are also included.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In 1983, The National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* which emphasized the need for reform to the American educational system. At that point in history, the commission determined that the established purpose of education, academic excellence, was no longer being achieved. The report concluded that curriculum and course offerings provided by districts and states for educating the nation's children were largely unchallenging for students. Specifically, commission members stated there was too much variety in the available curriculum and courses were too generic to provide a meaningful academic purpose for students. Students were gaining about 25% of the needed credits to graduate in less academically rigorous classes, such as physical education, remedial English and mathematics, and classes pertaining to preparation for adulthood and marriage. Moreover, the authors of the report asserted that students spent fewer hours per day and fewer days per year at school than students in other industrialized countries, students were not adequately prepared for college, and there was a shortage of appropriately trained teachers (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Hord (1997) contended that many district administrators found themselves lost in terms of what steps they should take to address the problem and were implementing short-term changes that were ultimately unsuccessful. Districts searched for quick-fix solutions that only delayed true progress. The work of this original commission eventually led to increased accountability measures for schools, school districts, and states, as mandated by the federal government (Thomas & Brady, 2005; Vinovskis, 2009).

Nearly 20 years prior to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), a federal policy specifically addressing the education of disadvantaged students, was enacted, and has seen reauthorizations since its inception. Education in the United States (U.S) needed transforming as the purpose of education changed from preparing students for factory jobs to preparing them for white collar opportunities arising after World Wars I and II, and now to ensuring students have the 21st century skills needed to advance in our increasingly technological society. This included educating all children, not just affluent White children (Borman et al., 2001). In 1991, the President George H. W. Bush administration unsuccessfully tried to pass America 2000 which sought to enact consistent learning standards and standardized assessments to gauge students' learning. Then in 1994, the ESEA was reauthorized as the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) with the expressed purpose of providing a framework for states to develop a standards-based education system and to enable schools to help support students as educational leaders worked to meet the demands of state academic and performance standards (Improving America's Schools Act, 1994). While President Bush's America 2000 legislation did not pass, it became an impetus for national academic standards in future administrations, including Goals 2000: Educate America Act, enacted during the Clinton administration. Goals 2000 consisted of four main elements which aimed to increase student achievement through challenging academic standards for all students and achievement testing as a means of accountability for increased student achievement (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

Eight years later, the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind, 2002) solidified the accountability expectations set forth in the Improving America's Schools Act (1994), requiring states to monitor and report the outcomes of student achievement on state-mandated tests. These tests measured how well schools and districts throughout the U.S.

fared in their efforts to increase academic achievement for students attending their schools over time. As stipulated by NCLB, each state was charged with overseeing the implementation and administration of an assessment system of the state's choosing, to measure the overall performances of districts and schools within their state. By 2014, 100% of students attending public schools were expected to demonstrate a proficient level of knowledge and skills in both reading and mathematics (NCLB, 2002). The most current reauthorization of the ESEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act, was enacted in 2015 under the Obama administration (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). This act carried forth the accountability standards from NCLB but added additional measures related to college and career readiness and for increasing equitable education for children in underperforming schools. Although more stringent accountability standards were enacted over time, curriculum could not be the only factor addressed if real progress in student achievement and other accountability factors was going to occur, so state, district, and local school leaders began to investigate strategies to increase student learning.

Statement of the Problem

One such strategy to not only increase student performance but also for teacher learning and continuous improvement of the organization is professional learning communities (PLCs). Kruse and Louis (1993) claimed that a form of teacher collaboration, PLCs, could benefit educators' ability to positively impact student achievement because when teachers have the opportunity to share best practices, to learn from one another, and to reflect, then students benefit. Through increased teacher professional development where teachers learn together and from each other, use data to make instructional decisions, and reflect upon their practices, PLCs were advanced as an alternative method of professional development within schools, placing an increased focus on student academic progress (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Researchers have

focused on the importance of principals and campus leaders creating and sustaining a campus culture to support PLCs. Stewart and Houchens (2014) harkened back to when principals could wade through paperwork in their offices while teachers provided instruction in their classrooms with everyone behind their own closed doors; however, the increased focus on student performance and teacher collaboration called for principals to serve as instructional leaders and move the school organization forward to become focused on collaboration, assessment, and continuous improvement.

Historically, it was thought that teaching in the U.S. was a solitary act (Lortie, 2002). It was common for teachers to work in isolation, with minimal time to prepare lessons, and with much less time to collaborate with other teachers in their school to discuss teaching strategies, curriculum, or student progress (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Teachers assigned to teach the same subject, sometimes across the hall from one another, often taught different skills with different expectations of proficiency. In such cases, some students ended the school year with skill sets that varied from those of their peers. The lack of collaboration time for teachers to acquire new ideas and methods to enrich student learning did nothing to help teachers share best practices so they could become better in their craft; nor did it help in educators' efforts to close student achievement gaps and achieve satisfactory progress on accountability measures. However, after NCLB (2002), district and school administrators realized that teaching in isolation was not best practice. If student learning was to be a priority, the collective efforts of teachers might be more effective and enhance the school as a learning organization for the benefit of all students.

Teachers are the center of PLCs as they work together in collaborative teams to determine what and how students need to learn, if students are mastering the required skills, and how teachers should respond if the students are not making sufficient progress or if they already

mastered the skills. However, the ability for teachers and staff to be able to do that work depends upon campus administrators establishing appropriate supports, resources, and a conducive campus culture. There has been a plethora of studies regarding how supports and resources, including time and space for PLCs to meet, professional learning to support professional growth, structures in place to learn from colleagues, a culture of continuous improvement, and opportunities for reflection can aide in the implementation of PLCs. These studies focused on the importance of district and campus leaders creating a culture and environment where PLCs could be implemented, supported, and sustained (Blankstein et al., 2008; DuFour et al., 2016; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kanold, 2011). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of research studies to identify and explore the types of actions a campus administrator might take to support a PLC, especially from the perspective of teachers. This intersection of theory and practice delineates the problem of practice for this study, which is the need to examine campus administrator's actions as they relate to the support of PLCs. If campus administrator actions and behaviors in support of PLC teams are not meaningful and do not contribute to the progress of PLC teams, then the administrator's and the teachers' time will be wasted. Thus, there is a need for the current study.

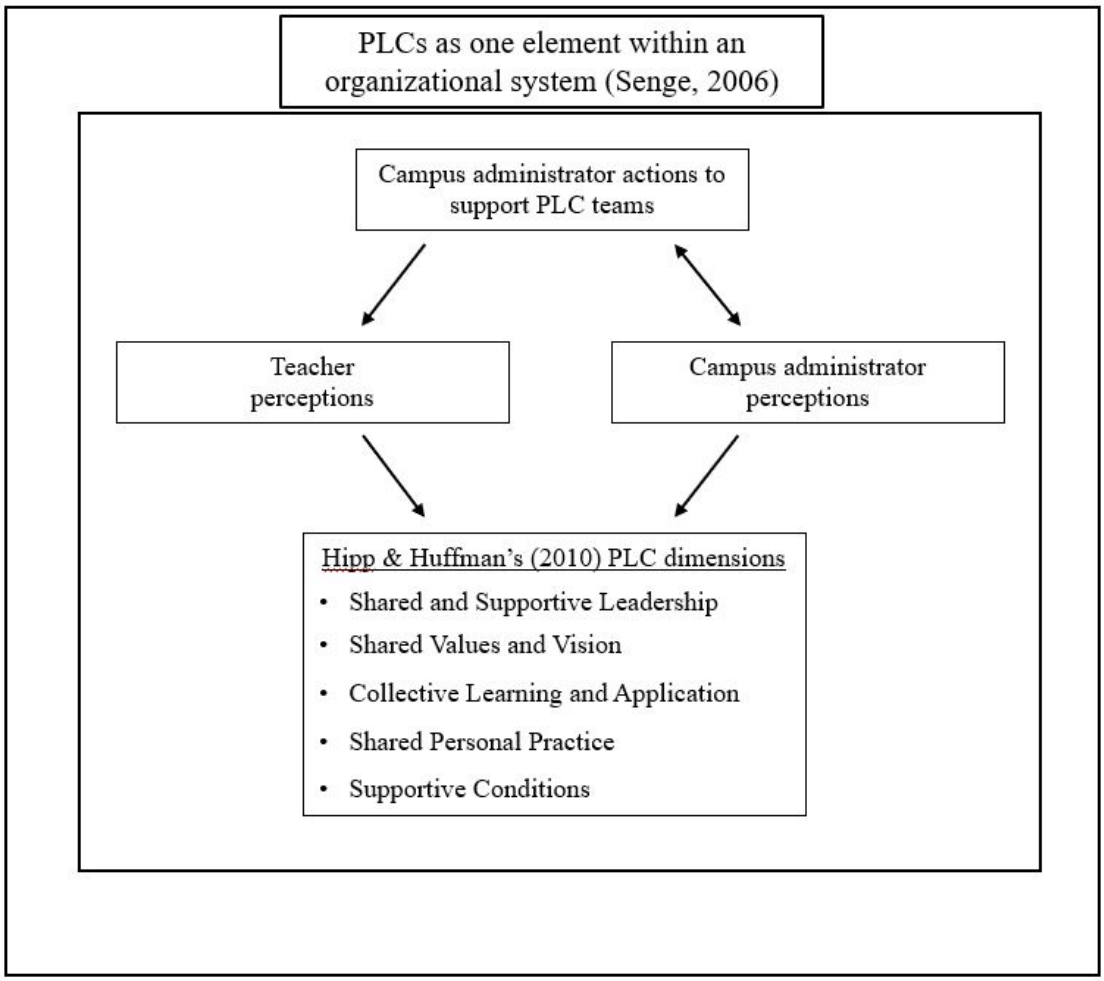
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on an organizational systems perspective as it relates to Hipp and Huffman's (2010) five PLC dimensions of shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. Senge (2006) argued that all interactions and actions within any system are interrelated and will affect each other in a way that patterns are created. Mental models shape how we view and react to situations based on our previous experiences and

schema. If participants of an educational system view the organization with a myopic view, or solely based upon their own mental model, they will never see how all the different parts of the system are interrelated and are affected by other parts, or where changes may need to be made to continually refine parts of the system for better overall functioning. In this study, the framework is organized to depict how PLCs are one component of a school system (see Figure 1) where interactions between the various components impact the effectiveness of PLCs and thus impact the entirety of the organization.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Depicting PLCs as One Component of a School System



The fidelity of actions within each LC dimension not only impacts that dimension but others as well. At the same time, the strength of PLC teams on a campus influences other elements of the organization. Campus administrators' actions to implement and support the PLC dimensions is not enough; why administrators make the decisions they make, and how those actions are perceived by teachers, are important elements for determining the efficacy of those actions. It is the interconnectedness of all elements, including PLCs, that determine how the system functions. This is especially important for campus leaders who need to have a finger on the pulse of all actions at a campus to facilitate the interconnectedness and to ensure all aspects are in support of the greater mission and vision of the campus.

Professional Learning Communities

DuFour et al. (2016) described how the purpose of schools is to ensure high levels of learning and progress for all students; however, campus leaders need to define what that looks like for their students and put forth the effort to achieve it. Fullan (1993) discussed the idea of schools developing into learning organizations to implement lasting change in what has been a conservative, change-adverse industry since its inception.

Perhaps one of the most current widely recognized models for PLCs is defined by DuFour et al. (2016) as having the characteristics of (a) shared vision, values and goals; (b) collaborative culture; (c) collective inquiry; (d) action orientation; (e) commitment to continuous improvement; and (f) results orientation. This model is taught to educators around the world through Solution Tree, Inc.'s *PLC at Work*® symposiums and through their vast library of literature. The pioneer PLC model was developed by Hord (1997) and was refined by Hipp and Huffman (2010) to include five dimensions: (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e)

supportive conditions. Through my own experiences, one way to view the integration of these two models is the DuFour et al. approach offers the practitioner the tools helpful for PLC implementation and sustainment while Hord's dimensions offer the foundational elements of successful PLCs. Many other PLC models exist and add their own elements or dimensions, but the common thread through them all is the focus on student learning and how adult educators interact and establish a culture that supports student learning.

The idea of collaboration is present in some form in all PLC models. Each of the models explains that collaboration is not simply the act of professionals working together, but it is the reliance upon each other as support, for learning from each other, and for a sense of community. PLC researchers also share the idea that an increase in student achievement will not occur in isolation, thus the need for educator collaboration (DuFour et al., 2016; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Stoll et al., 2006). Sparks (1988) recommended that for real change to occur in the education of students, teachers needed to meet in small groups to discuss, plan, and reflect upon their own teaching and new teaching strategies, all which should occur in PLC team meetings. In the same study, teachers expressed that when they had time to meet with other teachers and discuss their teaching, their confidence in trying new strategies increased. When teachers try new things then have an instructional support group to come back to and reflect with, teaching practices will change, and teachers will have the confidence to try new instructional strategies to impact student learning. PLC meetings with specific foci provide opportunities for teachers to practice what Hord (1997) deemed collective learning and application where teachers come together and solve problems, plan collaboratively, and work to ensure that best instructional practice decisions are made, all of which should contribute to increased student achievement.

Campus Leader's Role in Professional Learning Communities

A multitude of researchers have stated the importance of the direct involvement and actions of the principal as essential for the success of campus PLCs (DuFour et al., 2016; Cherkowski, 2016; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Mitchell & Sackney, 2006). In practice, this involvement includes such practices as cultivating a collaborative culture, especially through shared leadership practices, generating a collective vision, and ensuring supportive conditions are present (DuFour et al., 2016; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Thornton & Cherrington, 2014). DuFour et al. (2010) additionally emphasized that creating these conditions and leading schools to become learning communities "demands the sustained attention, energy, and effort of school and district leaders" (p. 253).

Campus leaders play an integral role in creating the culture of a school that will influence the organization as a learning community. Schein (2010) defined culture as a valid and accepted framework that guides the actions of group members to proficiently solve internal and external problems where those beliefs and actions are perpetuated to new members of the group. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) asserted that school culture is an abstract concept where "culture defines normalcy and morality for its members" (p. 19). If behaviors and actions on a campus are not congruent with messages communicated from the organization's leaders, the leadership cannot effectively implement change or move the organization forward and the campus cannot become a learning organization. Campus leaders are role models of the expectations for all students, staff members, and stakeholders (Mitchell & Sackney, 2006).

DuFour et al. (2016) described the mission, vision, values, and goals of the PLC to be the foundation upon which the other PLC dimensions live; without this firm base, there is no stability. Although staff members may have individual visions for what they believe to be the

purpose of education or what instruction will look like in their classrooms, it is imperative that a shared collective vision is created in which there is a specific and intentional focus on student learning by the entire staff (Hipp, 2003; Hipp & Huffman, 2010).

Supportive conditions and resources vary as much as campuses vary from one to another. Some examples of supportive conditions and resources may include a culture of trust and respect, PLC team collaborative meeting time during the school day, access to professional learning, and student achievement data (Hipp & Huffman, 2001; Hipp, 2003; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kanold, 2011). These supports do not magically appear, nor does the physical presence of a principal mean the supports are available. Leithwood and Azah (2015) discussed that effective communication is key to fostering trusting relationships on a campus where collaboration is valued. Campus leaders must establish these supports to help PLC teams flourish and ultimately impact student learning. When teachers and administrators can work together and share responsibility for developing and sustaining a culture supportive of PLCs, a collaborative environment can be created at the campus level (Hipp & Huffman, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore campus administrator and teacher perceptions of administrator actions that support professional learning communities (PLCs) for teachers in core-content subjects. Given the workload of campus administrators, time is a valuable commodity, and administrators need to ensure their efforts are spent in the most effective and efficient manner while still supporting PLCs. But who determines if administrator actions in PLCs are effective and supportive? Administrators may believe the actions they implement to support content-specific PLC teams help those professional teachers accomplish their goal or be more productive. However, teachers may have a different perception of the effectiveness of those

actions. The findings of this study may provide administrators guidance regarding how to best support PLCs on their campus. Currently, however, a deficient number of studies have been conducted examining the types of campus administrator actions teachers perceive as helpful to a PLC team.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions were explored:

1. What campus administrators' actions support PLC teams as perceived by teachers?
2. How do campus administrators perceive their support of PLC teams?

Significance of the Study

While there is much research to justify how campus administrators support PLCs through the perpetuation of a campus vision and mission (Kanold, 2011), supportive structures (Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hord & Sommers, 2008), and other actions, there is a deficit of literature to aide campus administrators in knowing which behaviors and actions teachers actually perceive to be helpful to the content-specific PLC. The findings from this study reveal teachers' perspectives about what campus administrator actions are perceived to be the most helpful and which are the most hindering to effective PLC practices at two north Texas high school campuses.

The findings derived from this mixed methods study may be helpful to campus administrators as they work effectively and efficiently with their PLCs while still having time to accomplish other responsibilities within a school day. District and campus-level administrators assigned at each of the participating high school campuses may be able to utilize the recommendations noted within the study and/or implement them on their campus. Additionally, the results of this study could provide campus leaders within the participating district, as well as at districts with similar profiles, an opportunity to reflect upon how they support their PLCs and

how they might alter their current approaches to better align with the preferred behaviors and actions suggested by the teacher participants in this study.

Delimitations

Several delimitations narrowed the focus of this study. Roberts (2010) defined delimitations as the constraints the researcher imposes on the study. One delimitation was the relatively small sample size. At the time of the study, Hilltop ISD (pseudonym) had 10 high school campuses, 17 middle school campuses, 42 elementary campuses, and 3 special program campuses, so sampling every campus was not feasible. Because this study took place in a large suburban school district with many campuses, the results may be less applicable to other school districts or campuses in other geographic and demographic circumstances. Two high school campuses were selected, for interviews with six campus administrators, twelve core-content teachers, as well as 58 teachers' survey responses. This limited sample size supported a more in-depth study of PLCs at each campus. The teacher interview participants were recruited because of their assignment within the core-content PLC teams within the structures created by the district and campus administrators. The study focused on high school campuses, excluding elementary and middle schools. In addition, the study focused solely on actions of campus-level leaders, including principals and associate or assistant principals; no other campus-level leader (department chair, instructional coach, team lead, technology coach) or district-level leader actions were examined. The quantitative and qualitative data collection took place over an eight-week period in the spring of 2021.

Assumptions

Several assumptions were held during this study. First, I assumed that the sample of practitioners for this study was representative of high school teachers and administrators of the

studied school district and of practitioners in the state of Texas and the United States. I also assumed that participants were familiar with the basics of PLC frameworks and expected outcomes of PLCs. Lastly, I assumed that all participant responses would be thoughtful and truthful.

Definition of Key Terms

The definitions below are provided to help the reader understand the terms within the context of this study.

- *Campus administrator.* For the purposes of this study, a campus leader includes the principal, associate principal, or assistant principal(s). This term is used interchangeably with the term campus leader.
- *Fast-growth district.* School districts with at least an enrollment of 2500 students the prior school year, a five-year enrollment increase of at least 10%, or a net increase of 3500 or more students are considered fast growth districts (Fast Growth School Coalition, 2020).
- *Professional learning community (PLC)*. PLCs involve "…professional educators working collectively and purposefully to create and sustain a culture of learning for all students and adults" (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 12).
- *Staff/staff members*. All adult staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students (Olivier et al., 2010, p. 32).
- *Stakeholders*. Parents and community members (Olivier et al., 2010, p. 32).
- *Teacher collaboration.* Teachers who collaborate create "…a systematic process in which teachers work together interdependently in order to impact their classroom practice in ways that will lead to better results for their students, for their team, and for their school" (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 12).

Organization of the Study

The paper resulting from this study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction and includes the problem statement and the purpose of the study, an explanation of the conceptual framework the study is based upon, and the research questions that guided the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature regarding the background of PLCs, the definition and models of PLCs, the role of campus leaders in PLCs, and the conceptual framework. Chapter 3 details the research methodology for this study, a description of the participants, and details about the data collection. Chapter 4 contains the results of the survey and interviews and an analysis of the data. Lastly, Chapter 5 provides the conclusions, a discussion of the study's findings, recommendations for school practitioners, and areas of possible future research.

Summary

For this study, I examined campus leader and teacher perceptions of campus administrator actions intended to support core-content PLC teams within two high schools in a large fast-growth suburban north Texas school district. Several factors were considered within this study, including campus leader and teacher perceptions of a campus administrator's role in support of core-content PLCs, teacher perceptions and the presence of practices related to supporting PLCs that were implemented on campuses, and teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of administrator behaviors that were intended to support PLC teams. The results of this study may help school leaders identify effective actions that are helpful to and supportive of PLCs on their campus. Chapter 2 includes an overview of published literature related to the topic of this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore campus administrator and teacher perceptions of administrator actions that support professional learning communities (PLCs) for teachers in core-content subjects. According to DuFour et al. (2016), education exists to ensure that all students access academic skills needed and learn at high levels; however, campus leaders must define what that looks like for their students and put forth the effort to achieve it. This process requires the collective effort of all educators on a campus, and the process is time-consuming when done with fidelity. Many districts and campuses make it a priority for campus administrators at the secondary level to attend content-specific PLC or collaborative team meetings. Is this an effective strategy in supporting those teachers and teams, or could campus administrators use their time to better impact student achievement in other capacities? This chapter includes a report of published literature related to the purpose of the study. Topics covered include education reform, the purpose of PLCs, dimensions of PLCs, implementation of PLCs, stages of PLCs, campus leaders' role in PLCs, and learning organizations and systems thinking.

Education Reform

Education reform is a familiar topic to most educators in today's education industry. However, the idea of implementing professional development, collaborating on best practices, and learning from other educators has not always been the story of how education and educator practices have been carried out. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act into policy to impact the poverty crisis in the United States and to provide equal access to education (Paul, 2016). The policy has seen reauthorizations with additional amendments tacked on since that time. The election of President Ronald Reagan in

1980 marked a shift in education reform as education funding was cut as a result of the president's goal to decrease the size of the government and to decrease the federal government's role in public policy (Thomas & Brady, 2005). However, under the same administration, a catalyst for change occurred in 1983 when The National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform,* which blatantly stated the dire position of the nation's educational system. The state of education at that time was described in the report as lackluster and unchallenging, students were not being prepared for college or life in general, and there were not enough qualified teachers to provide a high-quality education to students. These findings led to decades of trial and error in educational reform and to government-mandated accountability measures for schools, school districts, and states (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Thomas & Brady, 2005; Vinovskis, 2009).

The George H.W. Bush administration tried to pass America 2000 in 1991, which would set nationwide academic standards and assessment of those standards for all public-school students, to increase student achievement. Although unsuccessful, the failed legislation set the groundwork for future policy, including President Bill Clinton's Goals 2000, Educate America, which sought to set high academic standards for all students and to assess students' mastery of those standards as a way to measure the impact of education reform. In 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) was passed as a reauthorization of ESEA. This legislation required states who received Title I funds to prove the students who were eligible for these funds were held to the same high academic standards as other students and continued the dispute of whether the federal government or state government was ultimately in charge of education for the millions of students in the United States (McDonnell, 2005; Thomas & Brady, 2005).

In 2002, The George W. Bush administration reauthorized and renamed ESEA to the No

Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which added measures for further increasing academic achievement for students in schools across the United States (No Child Left Behind, 2002). Each state was charged with the task of ensuring 100% of students had proficient mastery of state-mandated skills as assessed using an assessment mechanism of the state's choosing by 2014. Should appropriate progress not be obtained toward the achievement goal set by federal policymakers, then sanctions would be implemented to motivate educators to close the achievement gaps and move toward student proficiency. Although more stringent accountability standards were enacted, the same students were in the same classrooms as prior to the legislation, so the curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy had to change to meet these new standards. In 2015, ESEA was reauthorized by the Obama administration as the Every Student Succeeds Act (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). While this reauthorization upheld the requirement for accountability based upon performance on annual statewide assessments, other elements were included as well. These include improving graduation rates, supporting innovative efforts that positively impact student academic progress, a focus on college and career readiness, and continued efforts to promote equitable access to education for all. Regardless of the federal legislation enacted, laws were not going to change the nation's education system; educators needed to find strategies and processes that made a positive impact.

Why PLCs

Hord (1997) contended that, through the series of education reforms, many school district leaders found themselves consciously unskilled in terms of what to do to meet the prescribed academic standards set by the federal government and their state. This concern led to many quick fixes that in turn only delayed true progress. It became necessary for states and school districts to

investigate strategies to increase student learning since the previous strategies and instruction would not yield the results needed to achieve proficiency on new accountability measures.

Traditionally, teaching in the United States was a solitary act. Teachers of the same subject whose classrooms were across the hall from one another could teach very different skills with different expectations of proficiency, and students ended the school year with varied skill sets. This did nothing to enrich student learning, help educators close achievement gaps, or help students achieve satisfactory progress on accountability measures. However, after NCLB, educators quickly began to realize that teaching in isolation was not best practice, and if student learning was to be the priority, then the collective efforts of teachers would do more to enhance the school as a learning organization for the benefit of all students. According to Kruse and Louis (1993), PLCs offer benefits to educators through increased teacher professional development, including a focus on student progress on skills and standards, instead of a focus on the historic objective of student compliance.

Stewart and Houchens (2014) harkened back to when principals could wade through paperwork in their offices while teachers provided instruction in their classrooms behind closed doors, but the increased accountability also meant principals had to become instructional leaders and move the school organization forward to become focused on collaboration, formative assessment, and continuous improvement. Teachers had to share ideas and refine best practices to help ensure progress for all students, not just the ones who happened to be in their classroom. Thus, the movement for PLCs began to take hold.

Thessin and Starr (2011) asserted that educators had been so focused on teaching students to collaborate to solve problems that they had forgotten to teach teachers how to do this themselves. Success with PLCs is found when schools are provided support by the district for

time to collaborate and for professional learning along the way. In their study, state assessment scores increased and one contributing factor from the teachers' perspective was because they were able to spend time collaborating and determining who was finding skill-based success with their students and how that was being achieved. This allowed other teachers to take the successful strategies back to the students in their classroom as well. PLCs at the district or campus level are not a magic wand to solve problems with meeting accountability standards; however, staff who learn together, utilize data to make informed decisions, and reflect on their professional practices can influence student achievement.

Dimensions of PLCs

In 1997, Hord identified five dimensions necessary for effective PLCs. Since that time, several others have continued this research to further define effective PLC practices (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour et al., 2016; Hipp & Huffman 2010; Olivier, 2009; Stoll et al., 2006). Through Hipp and Huffman's (2010) five dimensions of PLCs, educators work collaboratively to create an environment where student and adult learning is foremost to increase student achievement. To understand the full complexity of a high-functioning PLC, one must understand each of the five dimensions and how they function in isolation but also as an imperative component to systemwide progress.

Dimension 1: Shared and Supportive Leadership

Hord (1997) stated that leaders can no longer be viewed as the savior of an organization but instead must be democratic leaders who bring the organization together to utilize the strengths of all members to accomplish goals. Kanold (2011) noted how the role of the principal has changed over time from one of autonomy to one who shares control with team members. Prestine (1993) identified that principals must be able to democratically share authority, let go of

control and allow staff to work within the vision and mission of the organization, and be a participative member of the work without taking over, thus enabling teachers to do the work needed.

Campus principals cannot affect change on their own. Through building relationships and establishing effective means of communications, administrators can build the capacity of everyone in the building to support student achievement. Principals cannot be everywhere and do everything. They must build teachers' knowledge and skills so teachers can become leaders as well (Wilhelm, 2010). The success of PLCs and students cannot solely rest upon the shoulders of one person; if teachers are to have a level of accountability in student success, then they should share in the leadership aspects of attaining that progress. As teachers become more cognizant of their role in the increased success of students and their ability to drive change, the more they will see how their role in the PLC, and more widely as part of the campus, is an important part of the campus collaborative culture, as well as for student learning (Kanold, 2011).

Dimension 2: Shared Values and Vision

Vision guides an organization to help to define who or what the organization desires to become and focuses actions to move in that direction. Mission, vision, values, and goals are the essential pillars on which PLCs are built. The building leader must establish the mission, or the why, to bring clarity of purpose for why PLCs are integral on the campus. The vision dictates what the organization must be or become to accomplish the set goals, and the values and goals guide collective commitments and priorities (DuFour et al., 2016). Without a purpose and plan, PLCs will be another initiative with a finite lifespan. Without knowing the purpose and understanding why teachers are doing what they are doing, educators would never know if their efforts have been successful. Sinek (2009) wrote, "Success comes when we wake up every day

in that never-ending pursuit of WHY we do WHAT we do. Our achievements, WHAT we do, serve as the milestones to indicate we are on the right path" (p. 181). For educators, student learning and progress are the milestones and PLCs are the accountability mechanism to ensure educators are on the right path.

All staff and stakeholders must buy into the idea behind the vision or there will be no forward progress. Kanold (2011) asserted that campus leaders must be very clear and consistent in the expression of the vision as that is the idea others will use as a litmus. For the teachers and staff, the vision guides the decisions made related to student learning. As a PLC, educators in a school should ask themselves: Does this decision support our beliefs about who we are and where we want our students to be in their learning? If the answer is no, then those decisions do not support the vision.

Dimension 3: Collective Learning and Application

When teachers and staff share their learning and apply that learning to instructional and pedagogical practices, student learning can be impacted. However, when teachers return to reflect upon their processes and share the results with each other, continuous learning takes place through this shared personal practice. A culture must exist where there is a level of trust and confidence among members to share successes and failures with other professionals so everyone can grow from those experiences (Hipp & Huffman, 2010).

The collective learning of the staff builds upon previous knowledge to further promote the vision of the organization. An important and impactful distinction of this dimension is the focus on both educator practices and student learning. Professionals must continually learn and reflect upon their practices and how those practices impacted student learning (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Unless a collaborative team engages in discussions regarding what student

success or proficiency looks like, they may all come to the table with descriptions of practices that led to success, based on their individual definitions. That assumes they even remember what they did to elicit that success.

Dimension 4: Shared Personal Practice

The goal of shared professional practice and learning is to create a culture where teachers are comfortable observing and learning from each other. That culture supports feedback from each other that can serve as a change mechanism (Harris, 2013). Kanold (2011) stated that continuous improvement should be not just an idea but part of the foundation that drives staff and student learning. If educators expect students to progress toward their educational potential, then educators must understand that their own skills and knowledge must be refined as well. Hord (1997) added reflection to the definition of PLCs as a vital component as teachers must look at what they implemented instructionally, determine if it was effective, and use that knowledge to continue forward momentum for creating new ideas for teaching and learning. It cannot be expected that students will learn and make progress if educators do the same thing day after day and year after year.

To effectively engage in shared learning practices, teachers must be open to feedback from others who observe the learning taking place. Those who are observing must understand they are not present to evaluate a teacher, but instead to reflect on the practices of that teacher to inform their own teaching practices. Effective shared professional learning includes learning from or taking the advice from all available sources, including those who may be in the same building or from elsewhere (Harris, 2013). When teachers can observe each other to reflect upon their own practices and then take those effective practices back to their classroom, their students will benefit (Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Thessin & Starr, 2011).

Dimension 5: Supportive Conditions

As teachers work through the PLC process, they need to know they have the support of their campus administrators. As accountability measures continue to increase, teachers need to feel they can access resources that support their work and learning in the PLC and that structures are in place to support their work. Support comes in various forms, which can include structures, relationships, and external support systems (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Additionally, an important non-material support for teachers and PLCs is time with campus leaders to communicate the progress they are making, their needs, and their PLC reflections, so the campus leader can apply this learning to determine the progress and needs of the entire learning organization (Leclerc et al., 2012). As PLCs progress and expectations change, it is important to have an evaluation process in place to assess the usefulness of structures in place, identify structures that need to change or be eliminated, and determine what new structures may need to be created. Relationships need to be developed at all levels to create a community of trust. Teachers and campus leaders need to build trust in each other's level of content knowledge, in their purpose for why they do what they do, and in the idea that student learning is the ultimate reason for decisions that are made (Grossman et al., 2001; Westheimer, 1998, in Kilbane, 2009). No relationship is ever successful if there is no trust.

Implementation of PLCs

DuFour et al. (2016) made it clear that a PLC is not a couple of people who come together once a week for a set time to talk about a common topic. Instead, the PLC must be the whole organization, be it the district or the whole campus. Individual content or grade-level teams are necessary parts of the PLC puzzle; they cannot do their work alone and must have the support of the larger organization to be effective and successful. In light of this, at the campus-

level, administrators must shape a PLC culture by supporting specific PLC processes which create a conducive environment for grade-specific or content-specific teams to function effectively and to make an impact on student learning.

Implementation of PLC processes in collaborative teams can be a difficult shift for some educators as they are not accustomed to focusing on their and their students' learning since they historically focused on teaching. Teaching and learning are not synonymous. In addition, collaborative teams must be willing to accept that there is no level of perfection that will ever be good enough. Students change as do their needs; educators must change to meet those needs and do so through their own dedication to continual learning (DuFour, 2004). This can be a cultural shift for some campuses or teams. Teachers need a clear understanding of their role on collaborative teams and to understand that student learning is the ultimate goal. Campus leaders need a clear understanding of how their actions impact teachers and thus impact student learning. To plan for student learning, DuFour et al. (2016) stated that PLCs should be focused on four questions in their collaborative planning (p. 59):

- *What is it we want our students to know and be able to do?* This is directly tied to state standards. Teachers go beyond the surface-level reading of a standard and instead determine what skill or concept students should know or be able to perform at a specific level of mastery. In fact, according to Marzano et al. (2019), standards are not perfect and contain too much content, redundancy, and confusing description of content. It is imperative to spend time tweezing out what students are supposed to know.

- *How will we know if each student has learned it?* Collaborative teams determine what proficiency looks like for each skill so that each teacher in each classroom has the same level of expectations for students. In addition, the team determines the various evidences that will be

collected to determine if and when students master those skills.

- *How will we respond when some students do not learn it?* and *How will we extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?* Students do not learn at the same pace. With every skill, some students will achieve mastery faster than others. Some students will need additional supports to become proficient. These are facts that must be planned for from the onset. Students who master the skill more quickly should have an opportunity to continue their learning and be challenged. Teachers prepare for each of these cases so that eventually all students master all skills.

It seems reasonable to conclude that collaboration would be an important aspect in any effective PLC, but Schechter (2012) found that teachers can also shy away from sharing practices and working collaboratively because of the vulnerability and perceived threats of being intellectually or pedagogically inferior to their peers. Each of the PLC models explain that collaboration is not simply the act of professionals working together, it is the reliance upon each other as support, for learning from each other, and for a sense of community. The professionals must also share the idea that an increase in student achievement will not occur in isolation (DuFour et al., 2016; Stoll et al., 2006), so it is incumbent upon campus leaders to create a culture and environment where collaboration can occur freely.

Stages of PLCs

As campuses move to implement PLCs at the content-specific or grade-specific level, not all teams will be at the same stage of implementation; however, all teams need to be progressing in their implementation. Many factors can enhance a PLC's level of functionality as the team moves along the implementation continuum, and a team's effectiveness as a PLC could influence the way team members perceive administrator support of their PLC team. According to Voelkel

and Chrispeels (2017), members of high-functioning PLC teams regarded their principal's actions as more positive and transformative while members of low-functioning teams felt less empowered and had a more negative perception of the campus leadership. According to Hipp and Huffman (2010), school culture that reflects embedded and sustained PLC practices is a hallmark of successful schools which influence student and adult learning. Seven indicators have been identified that are beneficial in the determination of teams' progress toward becoming an effective PLC. These include: (a) the school's vision; (b) the physical and human conditions that encourage teachers to cooperate, learn, and share together; (c) the cooperative culture of the school; (d) the manifestation of leadership from both teachers and principals; (e) the dissemination of expertise and shared learning; (f) the topics addressed based on concerns related to student learning; and (g) decision making based on accurate data (LeClerc et al., 2012). Fullan (1985) recognized that when change must be made, the organization goes through phases as the change is implemented. Each phase requires its own supports as the participants move to the next phase. LeClerc et al. (2012) continued this idea but determined different stages of change, including initiation, implementation, or the integration stage of progression. DuFour et al. (2016) had similar ideas for the progression of teams, but included additional levels: pre-initiating, initiating, implementing, developing, or sustaining, which take a team or campus from not even thinking about implementing PLCs in the pre-initiating stage to PLC practices being part of the everyday culture and processes of the campus. It is important for all involved to realize teams across a campus will not be at the same stage at the same time. Support needed from campus leaders will vary depending upon the stage and the PLC team.

Campus Leaders' Role in PLCs

The principal plays a crucial role in implementing and sustaining PLCs on a campus

(DuFour et al., 2016; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kanold, 2011). A review of literature regarding the implementation and sustainment of PLCs will show that campus and district leaders' responsibilities include providing time for collaboration, space for teams to meet, continued professional learning for staff, teacher access to resources, and supportive partnerships. While teachers may do the heavy lifting when working with their specific team, principals and campus leaders influence PLC implementation and effectiveness through the ways they acquire and manage resources and build a culture that supports the PLCs (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; DuFour et al., 2016; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Stoll et al., 2006). Mitchell and Sackney (2006) identified four functions that principals must perform to build a learning community: (a) the center: the principal knows everything going on and happening in the school; (b) the holder of the vision: here, the principal builds, communicates, and sustains the vision of the school; (c) the builder: in this role, the principal creates structures so the focus is on working toward the vision and; (d) the role model: the principal's words and actions converge with how the principal lives the vision. None of the roles or responsibilities are any small task to achieve. Various factors also play into the ability of principals to establish these structures to foster the development and sustainment of PLCs on a campus.

Responsibilities for all educators have increased while, specifically in Texas, education funding has decreased. The Texas Association of School Administrators and Texas Association of School Boards compiled a list of school district and campus mandates from Texas educational law and policy with the goal of putting the unfunded and underfunded mandates into perspective so leaders can consider the costs when implementing mandates at their campus or in their district. In Texas, there are a total of 103 mandates and, of those, 78 mandates list *increasing the workload of existing employees* as a cost factor (Texas Association of School Administrators and

Texas Association of School Boards, 2017). No longer do teachers simply plan a lesson during their conference period, make their copies, instruct their students, attend a faculty meeting after school, and then go home to their families at night. Administrators not only monitor hallways and the cafeteria, check teacher lesson plans, and resolve discipline issues. Teachers and administrators are tasked with ensuring that federal and states mandates are fulfilled in addition to all other responsibilities incurred in the education of students. The implementation and sustainment of PLC processes with fidelity is time consuming, and with the growing list of responsibilities for teachers and campus administrators, no one has time to waste.

Often, school districts that have implemented PLCs require administrator attendance at collaborative team meetings on their campus. DuFour et al. (2016) asserted that principals should not be part of PLCs to ensure mere teacher compliance with expectations but to model what continuous learning for educators should look like. After their study of Sophisticated, Emergent, and Beginner teacher workgroups, Horn and Kane (2015) questioned whether teacher groups who have not achieved sophisticated classroom practices should come together as an unfacilitated PLC. The researchers found these teachers' discourse to be focused on covering content instead of rich conversations regarding student thinking and conceptually thinking about the content skills. In many instances, the principal may be required to be the facilitator of these groups to help provide opportunities for teachers to learn how to move their conversations in the direction that will impact student learning in more refined manners. As the lead learner on a campus, the principal is tasked with creating a culture where the five dimensions of PLCs exist and are continuously refined for improvement; however, there is a lack of literature regarding specific beneficial administrator actions when supporting PLC teams.

Learning Organizations and Systems Thinking

The conceptual framework this study was based upon presents the idea that schools are complex organizations, and for the school to evolve and progress as a learning organization, members must have a systems perspective. Each person views the system, or their part within the system, through their own lens based upon their past experiences; this is what Senge (2006) referred to as mental models. School systems have historically been conservative organizations that somewhat adjusted to the ever-changing demands of society, law and policy, and the needs of students, but have not realized the true potential of those within the organization or the capacity of the organization as a whole. School systems develop into learning organizations when culture and processes align and include opportunities for reflection, as well as continuous and collective learning, and seek continuous improvement. Senge's (2006) vision of a learning organization emphasized employees' ability to create, problem-solve, learn, and collaborate to continually push the organization forward. Senge's definition is often applied to corporate businesses as they promote innovation but falter when a CEO leaves because that one person possessed all the knowledge. Instead, Senge insisted that, for optimal success, organizations should tap into the strengths and abilities of all members of an organization and members will contribute to the greater good of the organization as they acquire new knowledge and apply it to the organization. As it applies to the education industry, the more district or campus leaders invest in the learning of all members of the organization, the greater capacity the whole organization will have when tackling challenges. This includes changing or aligning each person's mental model to congruently view the organization's strengths, challenges, and potential so the organizational will continue to evolve as a system. Structures and processes are needed to make smaller teams within schools run efficiently and effectively as they work toward

the common goal of student achievement, thus the concept of PLCs was born and defined by Astuto et al. (1993) as a community where educators engage in a cycle of continuous learning and then implement what they learned and share it with others. The dimensions of PLCs described earlier mirror the five disciplines Senge (2006) described as essential to the ensemble, which include: (a) systems thinking, (b) personal mastery, (c) mental models, (d) building shared vision, and (e) team learning. There are other researchers who also developed ideas similar to Senge's disciplines. Garvin et al. (2008) identified the three essential elements of a learning organization to include "1) a supportive learning environment, 2) concrete learning processes, and 3) leadership that reinforces learning" (p. 1). Regardless of the researcher, the common focus for learning environments is the continued learning of the members and how that learning is applied to continually propel the organization forward.

Fullan (1993) discussed the idea of schools developing into learning organizations to implement lasting change in what has been a conservative industry since the beginning, and he proposed that true educational reform may never occur in education because it has been constant and unchanging for so long. Nonetheless, educators have an ethical and moral responsibility to enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills in students; since the world is ever-changing, inherently, teachers must change to meet these needs.

Simply acting as a learning organization will not solve all that ails the education system. For schools to move from having innovative practices that are once-and-done good ideas for achieving sustained success and progress in the industry, Senge (2006) would argue that educators need a systems-thinking perspective. Systems thinking is the ability to "make the full patterns clearer and to help us see how to change them effectively" (p. 7). When applying this idea to schools and PLCs, a collaborative team cannot simply prescribe to an individual mental

model regarding state standards, curriculum, assessment, individual student needs, and the plethora of other facets of planning but must think of the interconnectedness of those elements and how they collectively impact the greater system. The teams must then conceptualize how their team's actions and outcomes affect the larger organization (Rhodes, 2003). Educational learning organizations that integrate the dimensions of PLCs but have members who do not have a system thinking approach will never reach full potential. Campus leaders have the vantage point of seeing the entire school from the systems perspective, which can aide administrators in being able to see what Senge coined "dynamic complexity" (2006, p. 71), the interrelationships and interconnectedness of cause and effect of actions or behaviors across a system. In his book, Senge included an analogy of the complexity of the war on terrorism and how the United States reacted out of a perceived threat, yet the terrorist organizations actively recruited and grew out of fear of aggression from the United States. The issue is cyclical rather than that of a linear issue. To liken a similar analogy to PLCs would equate to sustained success in PLCs and how campus leaders can impact PLCs is dependent upon the teachers' perceptions of administrator participation and leadership of PLCs. Campus leaders' provision of resources for collaborative teams cannot alone ensure implementation or sustainment of PLCs with fidelity.

Summary

Through this literature review, a historical overview of educational reform provides a foundation to clarify the need for continued reform for schools to meet mandated accountability standards, and, more importantly, to ensure student learning and progress. PLCs are a paradigm shift for educators as there is a shift from working independently to collaborating with others to learn and to refine practices. At the campus level, administrators and other campus instructional leaders play an integral role in ensuring true collaborative teams exist and have the means for

sustainment. It is necessary for campus leaders to view PLCs, not only within a specific content area, but from the systems thinking perspective. Leaders cannot work to solve the obstacles to PLC implementation and sustainment if they do not understand those obstacles from the teachers' point of view, especially if the campus administrator may be part of the hinderance. There is much research detailing teachers' actions required to make actual collaborative meetings effective; however, there is a void in the literature regarding what those specific behaviors or actions are for an administrator. Chapter 3 provides an outline of the research design and process for this mixed methods study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore campus administrator and teacher perceptions of administrator actions that support professional learning communities (PLCs) for teachers in core-content subjects. Teacher perceptions of the campus and of classroom practices which support the five PLC dimensions on their campus were surveyed using the Professional Learning Community Assessment- Revised (PLCA-R), developed by Olivier et al. (2010). Teachers were provided the PLC Innovation Configuration Map (PLC-ICM) (Hipp & Huffman, 2010) prior to completing the survey so they would have a frame of reference for characteristics of PLC implementation (Appendix B). Teacher perspectives were then explored in-depth through participant interviews using a protocol based on Hipp and Huffman's (2010) dimensions of PLCs that were grounded on Hord's (1997) seminal work. Campus administrators were interviewed to gather information regarding their perception of their own actions in support of PLC teams on their respective campus. Campus and PLC documents were also reviewed to analyze PLC processes and practices.

In this chapter, the methodology of this study is described. The research questions are listed first to frame the direction of the study, followed by the research design and the rationale for the choices made. A description of the research sites and population follows to allow the reader to understand how and why sample participants were selected and the context in which this study took place. Following this, the data collection tools are described, including the details of the survey and the interview structure utilized. I also include my positionality within the study as it can add to the understanding of the context of the study. Lastly, the limitations are discussed

to draw the appropriate parameters around the study. This study was based on the following research questions:

1. What campus administrators' actions support PLC teams as perceived by teachers?
2. How do campus administrators perceive their support of PLC teams?

Research Design

Campus administrator and teacher responsibilities have increased concurrently with an increase in accountability standards. The implementation of PLCs has been widespread in educational organizations as one strategy to increase student achievement through increased teacher collaboration and professional learning (Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Kruse & Louis, 1993). A campus culture must be created that supports the implementation and sustainment of PLCs if PLCs are to function effectively and have an impact on student learning. Without a campus wide supportive culture, PLCs would simply be the next initiative that does not have a firm foundation and will simply vanish in a short time. While there is much research regarding what supports are needed to effectively implement and sustain PLCs, and regarding what aspects teachers should discuss and review during collaborative meetings, there is little research from the teacher perspective on how a campus administrator can meaningfully support PLC teams.

An explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was proposed to achieve the goal of understanding teachers' and campus leaders' perceptions of administrator behaviors that may or may not support campus-level core-content PLC teams. This research design was appropriate for this study as the qualitative data would help to further explain and provide context to the initial quantitative data collected, as suggested by Creswell (2012). The quantitative portion of the study was based on a survey to determine teachers' perceptions of the school-based practices in place which support PLCs on their respective campus. The survey data

were collected and analyzed prior to the collection of the qualitative data. The qualitative portion of the study included one-on-one semi-structured interviews with selected teachers and campus administrators from the participating campuses, as well as a review of campus and PLC artifacts.

With the goal of understanding interactions between humans in the professional social setting of schools, an inductive study design was appropriate as I sought to understand teachers' and campus administrators' thoughts and feelings and gain an understanding from their perspective. This inductive design is recommended by Hesse-Biber (2017) and Rowlands (2005). Inductive research is gaining importance in qualitative research methodology as researchers rely on data gathered to provide new insight into why particular phenomena occur instead of utilizing existing constructs through which to view and analyze those phenomena (Gioia et al., 2012). The importance lies in the idea that individual PLC participants develop their own subjective meanings regarding administrators' actions based on their own personal experiences; therefore, each PLC member may have different perceptions regarding administrator support of the PLC teams (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019), none of which may align with researchers' preconceived understandings or theories, which underscores the need for an inductive study design.

Population and Sampling

Permission to conduct the study was acquired from the appropriate district personnel and participating campus principals prior to beginning the study. Hilltop ISD (pseudonym) is a suburban Texas school district with over 60,000 students and more than 5,000 educators. The district has been identified as a fast-growth district since the early 1990s; the rapid population growth resulted in the opening of 68 new campuses in the district since 1993, including nine additional high school campuses ([District], 2019). The quick expansion led to the need for districtwide processes so students across the district would be provided equitable learning

experiences irrelevant of what campus they attended. The exponential population growth and increased accountability measures prompted district leaders to look for ways to ensure instruction was occurring at high levels at each of the campuses across the district. In addition, district members stressed the importance of staff sharing responsibility for student learning, thus districtwide PLC essentials were created as a framework to guide district staff as one way to accomplish the district mission. The need for systemwide initiatives led to implementation of content-level PLC teams (among many other processes and initiatives) at all district high school campuses. The school district has since supported the implementation of campus content PLC teams by providing opportunities for professional learning for campus leaders and teachers through PLC conferences and various district-level learning opportunities. For many years, this included attendance by campus leaders, instructional coaches, teachers, instructional coordinators, and district leaders at Solution Tree, Inc.'s *PLC at Work*® symposiums where the PLC work of DuFour and Eaker (1998) was the focus. There is also a district expectation that each campus will provide collaborative teams time to meet during the school, a place to meet, and support from content instructional coaches. While there are many school districts where PLC practices are implemented, Hilltop ISD was purposively chosen for this study because it is a large district with many high schools that offer various PLC experiences for teachers, and where PLC implementation and sustainment was a district expectation and had been for several years. The fact that PLC teams had been present in the district for several years provided leaders and teachers various PLC experiences. According to Creswell (2012), purposive sampling is beneficial because individuals with experiences related to the purpose of the study can provide information to aid in understanding the studied phenomenon. As Yin (2016) suggested, because of these characteristics, Hilltop ISD and the participating campuses had the potential to yield

ample data that were most relevant to help answer the research questions.

To obtain a purposeful sample from the population of district high school campuses, the district secondary curriculum director was provided the PLC Development Rubric (PLCDR) (Hipp, 2003) found in Appendix C to determine which two district high school campuses most successfully implemented and supported the PLC dimensions at the Implementation and Institutionalization phases. While there is merit in studying campuses where PLC implementation is in a more pre-initiating or emerging stage, this study focused on campuses where PLC processes were already in place. With the goal of understanding perceptions of administrator actions in support of PLC teams, it would be quite difficult to study this phenomenon if PLC structures or processes were not implemented and if the culture of the campus did not support PLCs. One campus was excluded from the possible sample as it was the campus where I most recently was a campus administrator. All core-content teachers at both participating high school campuses were emailed an invitation to participate in the PLCA-R survey through the plcassociates.org website. Only core-content teachers (English, mathematics, science, and social studies) were asked to participate in the survey and the subsequent interviews. Although there were content areas (such as world languages, health, physical education, and career and technology) outside the core-content subjects that had teacher teams on the campus, they were far fewer. Many elective teachers and singleton teachers (only one teacher per campus who teaches the class) had a PLC team districtwide but not within their campus whereas almost all core-content teachers teach at least one subject where they had a teacher team to collaborate with on their specific campus. The teachers who had a districtwide PLC team may experience different expectations and support since campus administrators from various campuses may work to support those teams. The inclusion of interviews from core-content teachers at each

participating campus provided a broad range of information based on teachers' varied experiences and provided context to survey results. This subgroup of interview participants from within the greater purposive sample of high school campuses included participants from teams that presented discrepant or highly congruent data on the PLCA-R survey. All teachers from those PLC teams were invited to participate in an interview for a minimum of six teacher interviews per campus. Three campus administrators at each participating campus, including the principal, were interviewed to gain an understanding of the leadership behaviors that support PLC teams on their campus. The administrators interviewed, other than the principal, were identified by the campus principal as those who were most knowledgeable of or those who worked with the campus core-content PLC teams the most. With participant permission, all interviews were audio-recorded using the Rev.com© application on a smartphone, with a handheld audio recorder as back-up, and then were transcribed. All transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.ti© for coding purposes. Anonymity

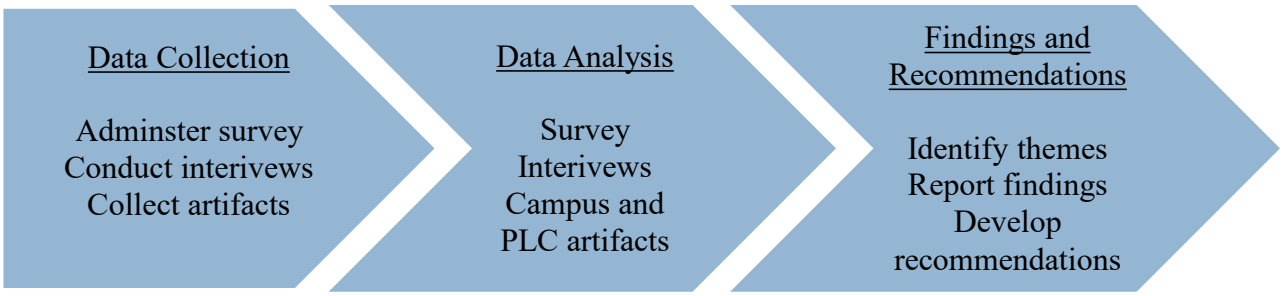
Data Collection Tools

To gain an understanding of the dynamics of administrator supports and to understand what administrator actions campus leaders and teachers deem as helpful within the context of PLC teams, multiple data collection sources were utilized, including the Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised survey (Olivier et al., 2010), teacher interviews, campus administrator interviews, and a review of campus and PLC artifacts. The various data sources allowed for triangulation of data. According to Creswell (2012), in the explanatory sequential design, "the quantitative data and results provide a general picture of the research problem; more analysis, specifically through qualitative data collection, is needed to refine, extend, or explain the general picture" (p. 542). Thus, the participant interviews and analysis of artifacts allowed

for the opportunity to expand upon the data collected through the survey tool. Figure 2 indicates the research sequence from data collection to reporting the findings and recommendations.

Figure 2

Explanatory Sequential Study Sequence



The PLCA-R survey seeks to assess the existing classroom and school practices of a campus in relation to the five PLC dimensions (Olivier, 2003) previously discussed.

Table 1

PLCA–R Survey Statement Sample

	Statements	Scale			
		SD	D	A	SA
	Shared and Supportive Leadership				
1	Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.				
10	Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.				
	Shared Values and Vision				
13	Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.				
18	Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.				

Source. Olivier et al. (2010).

The PLCA-R survey is a 52-item assessment (not including customized questions I added) to which respondents indicated their answers according to a 4-point Likert scale (Olivier et al.,

2010) with choices ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. At the end of each section, respondents had the option to provide additional comments. The survey was completed online through the plcassociates.org website. According to PLC Associates, the groups that administers the survey, it has an internal consistency of the Cronbach Alpha for the subscales shown in Table 2. These results were based on an analysis of 1209 cases where the survey was administered.

Table 2

PLCA-R Cronbach Alpha Reliability

PLC Dimension	Cronbach α
Shared and Supportive Leadership	.94
Shared Values and Vision	.92
Collective Learning and Application	.91
Shared Personal Practice	.87
Supportive Conditions-Relationships	.82
Supportive Conditions-Structures	.88

Source: Hipp & Huffman (2010).

The data from this survey provided insight because teachers' perception of the strength or weakness of the surveyed practices could impact their perception of administrator participation with their PLC. There were five additional customized questions added to the survey to gather demographic data from the respondents, such as how long they had been a teacher, how long they had worked at that campus, and how long they had been part of their current PLC team(s). The survey took approximately 10 minutes for participants to complete.

Following the quantitative portion of the study, the survey, qualitative data were collected, beginning with interviews. Interviews offer the opportunity for researchers to gain insight into an individual's own perspective of their experiences or of an event (Hesse-Biber,

2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). During the qualitative data collection phase of the study, interviews with teachers and campus administrators from the two campuses helped to provide understanding of the various administrator actions across different campus cultures and the PLC supports in place at the respective campuses. To answer Research Question 1, a total of 12 (six teachers from each campus) one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers from each campus who were chosen from varying PLC teams, based upon data from the survey. Appendix F includes the interview protocol used.

The principal and two additional campus administrators at each of the two participating high school campuses were asked to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to gain data from those leaders' perspective regarding what leadership behaviors they exhibit in support of PLC teams at their campus. Appendix H includes the protocol used for these interviews. Data from the six campus administrator interviews were used to answer Research Question 2.

All interviews were conducted through the Zoom™ virtual meeting platform because in-person interviews were not a safe option at the time, due to COVID-19 pandemic precautions. To increase credibility, each interview protocol employed in the semi-structured interviews was field tested with adjustments made prior to utilization. Interviews were designed to last no more than one hour. With participant permission, all interviews were audio-recorded; the recordings were transcribed using Rev.com©. During the interviews, notes were taken to notate participants' body language and behaviors.

Using a document analysis protocol (Appendix I), relevant artifacts of the campus PLC processes were analyzed. According to Creswell (2012), documents can provide valuable information to researchers regarding central phenomena. Bowen (2009) provided five purposes

of document analysis as a data point within a study. These include: (a) to provide context or background knowledge, (b) to generate additional questions to be considered or answered, (c) to provide additional information to the knowledge base, (d) to serve as evidence of change over time, and (e) to verify other sources of information. All these purposes were appropriate for including document analysis in this study.

Data Collection Strategies

To assess any discrepancy between the espoused practices and the practices in use (Argyris 1996, 1997) regarding the implementation of campus PLCs, the Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised (PLCA-R) was utilized. Olivier (2003) posited that many school leaders refer to their campuses as professional learning communities (PLCs) but do not actually meet the operational criteria. All teachers in the four content areas, at each of the studied campuses, 152 teachers total, received an email from me, inviting them to participate in the survey. The survey assesses "everyday classroom and school practices" in relation to the five PLC dimensions (Olivier, 2009, p. 4). Teacher perception of implemented practices that support PLCs may differ from what actually is implemented, and the campus administrator supports provided to PLCs may or may not align with the supports needed.

After the conclusion of the survey and survey data were analyzed, teacher and campus administrator interviews were conducted. The campus principal and two other campus administrators at the participating campuses were invited to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews using an interview protocol comprised of 15 open-ended questions (Appendix H). According to Gioia et al. (2012), semi-structured interviews are an essential element of inductive studies "to obtain both retrospective and real-time accounts by those people experiencing the phenomenon of theoretical interest" (p. 19). Information regarding

administrators' perceptions of leadership supports for PLC practices on their campus was valuable in adding to the context of teachers' information. Administrators and teachers view leadership support through different lenses so, to understand the whole picture, it was valuable to understand the intent and reasoning from the administrators' perspectives.

PLC teams to be interviewed were chosen from core-content teams at each campus whose team level survey data showed to be discrepant with or highly congruent with other survey data. All teachers on those selected teams were emailed an invitation to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview. The in-depth interviews provided participants the ability to share additional thoughts and feelings regarding their PLC experiences that may be unique to them and not captured through a response to a specific survey item (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The first two teacher interview questions were intended to create rapport with the interviewee and to gain information regarding their experience with PLC teams. Subsequent questions elicited data related to each person's experience with their current PLC team and their perceptions regarding actions administrators may take to support PLC teams (Appendix F). All interview participants were informed that they could cease participation in the study at any point, with no consequences. Field testing of the campus administrator and teacher interview protocols was completed with administrators and teachers at different high school campuses to determine if questions were appropriate for gaining the data needed to answer the research questions. Those field testers were not part of the study.

In addition to the survey and one-on-one interviews, campus and PLC team documents regarding PLC processes, implementation, and support efforts were analyzed. For individual content PLC teams to engage in PLC processes, deeply rooted beliefs and processes need to be in place at the district and campus levels. Saldana (2016) described how artifacts offer clues of the

author's background, experiences, and priorities that help to describe what is valued. The artifacts were analyzed for evidence of the PLC dimensions. Campuses in Hilltop ISD have participated in professional learning regarding learning communities through attending professional conferences and learning opportunities through outside agencies and the school district. Most campus leaders also established supports, such as time during the day for teacher teams to meet. In the campus administrator interviews, I asked participants to share with me any campus artifacts pertaining to the study that they were comfortable sharing. I also sought permission from the principal for teacher interviewees to share campus artifacts, so teachers would not feel they were breaching any campus confidentiality by sharing with me. Additionally, I asked teachers to share with me any artifacts pertaining to their own PLCs. This allowed me to analyze the alignment of campus strategies to administrator actions that support PLC teams and continued professional learning regarding learning communities on the respective campuses.

Data Analysis Strategies

Quantitative data analysis strategies were utilized to interpret the data from the PLCA-R survey to provide information to answer Research Question 2. The PLCA-R survey consists of 52 statements broken into five categories that align with Hord's (1997) and Hipp and Huffman's (2010) PLC dimensions where participants respond to each statement using a Likert scale with choices ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree.* When the online survey tool is utilized, the researcher can analyze data by individual responses, by groups, and by subgroups. The average rating for each of the survey items was reported. This provided information regarding the relative strengths and areas for refinement for each PLC dimension, holistically and at each campus. Disaggregated data provided additional information by groups and subgroups and allowed for thorough analysis and comparison of the data.

The participant interviews, consisting of open-ended questions, were analyzed through qualitative analysis strategies. With participant permission, interviews were audio recorded using the Rev© application on a smartphone and a hand-held audio recorder as back-up. Interviews were then transcribed using Rev.com©. For member checking purposes, once an interview was transcribed, the transcript was emailed to the corresponding participant to review, correct, or amend as necessary. Then the transcriptions were uploaded to Atlas.ti© software for analysis. For the first order analysis, the written transcripts from all one-on-one interviews were coded using open coding so that codes were similar to the original data or the participants' own words representing their perceptions (Yin, 2016; Saldana, 2016; Gioia et al., 2012). In the second order analysis, these codes determined recurring categories presented by interviewees which were then collapsed into emergent themes. Data regarding the themes that emerged were analyzed and compared with data from the survey.

District and campus artifacts that inform PLC processes and expectations set forth by either the specific campus or that PLCs used in their everyday practices were collected and analyzed. These artifacts included documents or presentations regarding campus PLC processes, learning about PLCs, and other professional learning presentations. The artifacts were analyzed for evidence of baseline expectations set forth on the individual campuses and how PLC teams are supported on the campus and how these artifacts aligned with or diverged from data gathered from the survey and the participant interviews. A document analysis matrix was used to analyze documents and artifacts for evidence of supports for PLCs.

Researcher Positionality

Throughout the research process, it is important for researchers to be cognizant of their personal role and the way their "subjectivity, and assumptions directly relate to and shape [their]

research" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 46). As a current administrator within Hilltop ISD, it was important for me to be aware of my own positionality. My own experiences, current employment in the district, beliefs regarding PLCs, and educational beliefs had the ability to influence the study and its results. As an insider researcher, someone who is part of the community where research is being conducted, it was vital for me to be reflexive to limit the impact my position could have had on the outcome of the study, as encouraged by Yin (2016). To identify participating campuses, I asked the district curriculum director to inform me of the top two campuses where PLC processes and structures were implemented with the greatest fidelity. Creating rapport with participants was key, but throughout the study, bracketing helped me to remain objective and not allow my current role in the district, or my beliefs, thoughts, or experiences to influence the participants or the analysis of the data. Hesse-Biber (2017) articulated how the goal of qualitative research is to interpret the lived experiences of participants; therefore, engagement with participants was key to obtaining the most detailed and accurate responses to the interview questions and being an insider research was a benefit in that process. Because of my positionality, the campus where I previously served as an administrator was not included.

Limitations of the Study

A central limitation of this study was the vast difference of each campus' culture regarding PLCs, along with the levels of implementation and sustainment of PLCs on each campus. There were many factors that could have resulted in variances in teacher answers between the two sampled high schools, including how long the principal had been at the campus, administrator and teacher beliefs regarding PLCs, how long each teacher had been on the campus, and teachers' prior experiences with PLCs. Although participants were provided the

PLC-ICM prior to taking the survey, their previous experiences with PLCs or their biases regarding the practices at their current campus could have impacted their responses to the survey statements or the interview questions. Another possible limitation could have been the respondents' lack of trust that their responses would remain confidential. Other participants may not have taken the survey or interview seriously and provided erroneous information, or they may not have really wanted to participate in the research at all. Although these limitations may be possible, precautions were taken to mitigate the potential negative implications.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, ethical principles were considered. All participants were informed of the purpose, procedures, and possible risks regarding their participation in the study and they had opportunities to have questions regarding the study answered. All participants were provided an informed consent form before participating in the survey and interviews and were provided the opportunity to cease participation in the study at any point. All campuses and interview participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity and that of their data. Additionally, data security measures, such as multiple password protections on a secured device, and keeping the key to participant pseudonyms in a separate and locked location away from any written or typed interview data or notes were implemented to maintain participant and data confidentiality. I also completed the National Institute of Health's *Protecting Human Subject Research Participants* online training course on September 18, 2019.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand campus leaders' and teachers' perceptions of administrator actions and behaviors that support high school core-content PLC teams. An explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was implemented to collect the data to

answer the research questions. Chapter 4 includes the findings from the data collected in this study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore campus administrator and teacher perceptions of administrator actions that support professional learning communities (PLCs) in core-content subjects. I investigated the current practices in place at two high school campuses where expectations were present for PLCs and PLC processes were implemented and supported. I also investigated campus administrator perceptions of their support for PLCs and teacher perceptions of those campus administrator supports. Two research questions guided the work within this study. The research questions were:

1. What campus administrators' actions support PLC teams as perceived by teachers?
2. How do campus administrators perceive their support of PLC teams?

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were utilized in this mixed methods study. First, quantitative data were collected through the Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised survey instrument (Olivier et al., 2010), with author permission. The PLCA-R survey seeks to assess the existing classroom and school practices of a campus in relation to the five PLC dimensions (Olivier, 2003). The survey assesses and reports findings for Dimension 5, Supportive Conditions into two subgroups: relationships and structures. Pseudonyms were utilized for the participating campuses. They are referred to as High School A (HSA) and High School B (HSB). Next, teacher perceptions were investigated through one-on-one semi-structured participant interviews using a protocol based on Hipp and Huffman's (2010) dimensions of PLCs that were grounded on Hord's (1997) foundational work (Appendix F). Analysis of these data were used to answer Research Question 1. To answer Research Question 2, data were analyzed from campus administrators' interviews regarding their perception of their own actions in support of PLC teams on their respective campus (Appendix H). Campus and

PLC documents were also reviewed to analyze the studied sites' PLC processes and practices to support the data collected from the survey and interviews.

In this chapter, I describe the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data and present the results of the analyses. Data analysis is presented by research method and the respective research question the data answer.

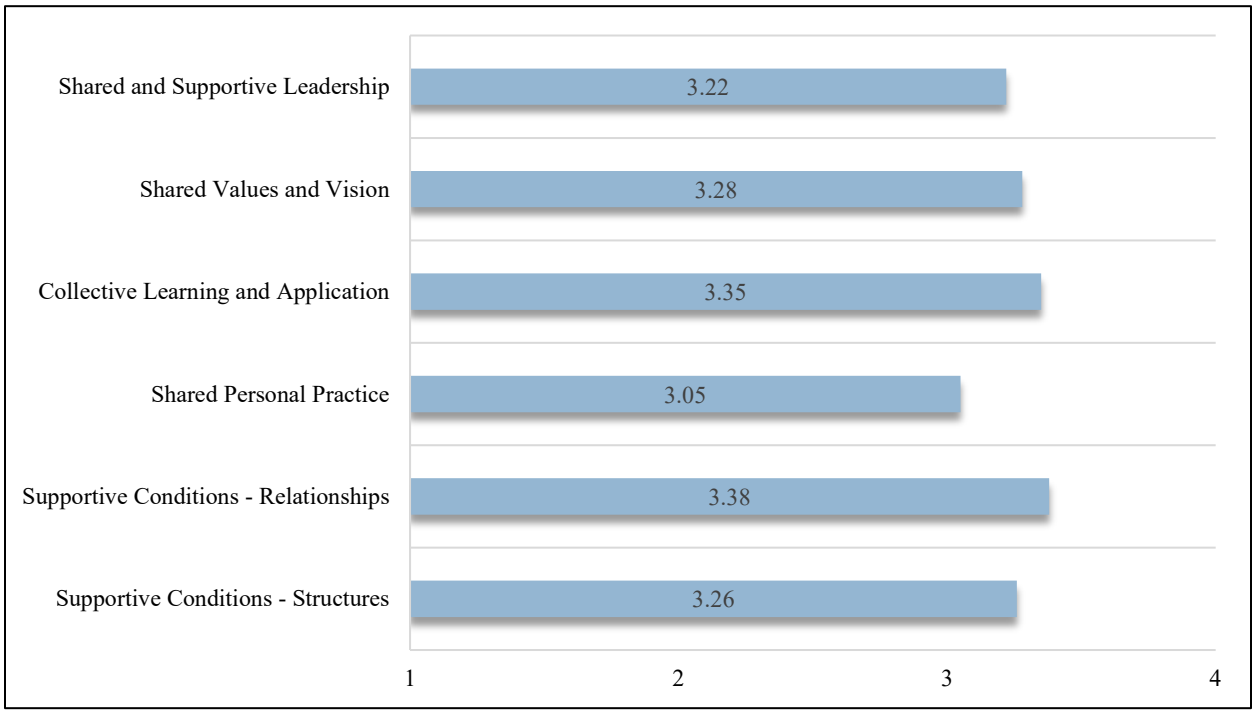
Quantitative Analysis Results

The quantitative data for this study were collected through the administration of the Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised survey (Olivier et al., 2010). The survey link was emailed to all core-content (English, mathematics, science, and social studies) teachers at the two participating high school campuses, for a total of 152 teachers, inviting them to agree to participate in the study then to complete the survey. A total of 58 teachers responded to the survey for a response rate of 38% of potential participants. According to the meta-analysis conducted by Lozar-Manfreda et al. (2008), surveys conducted via email have a mean response rate of 32.7% and average an 11% lower response rate than other survey modes. All survey items were scored by participants through a four-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, *strongly disagree)*.

The following is an analysis of the quantitative data collected through the survey instrument and a presentation of the findings for how the data address Research Question 1 regarding teacher perceptions of administrator actions that support PLCs. Figure 3 provides the mean score for each of the PLC dimensions. The data are disaggregated by PLC dimension, by subgroups (teacher total years of teaching, teacher total years of teaching in Hilltop ISD, and content department), and by campus.

Figure 3

Mean for Each PLC Dimension, for All Participants



Dimension 1: Shared and Supportive Leadership

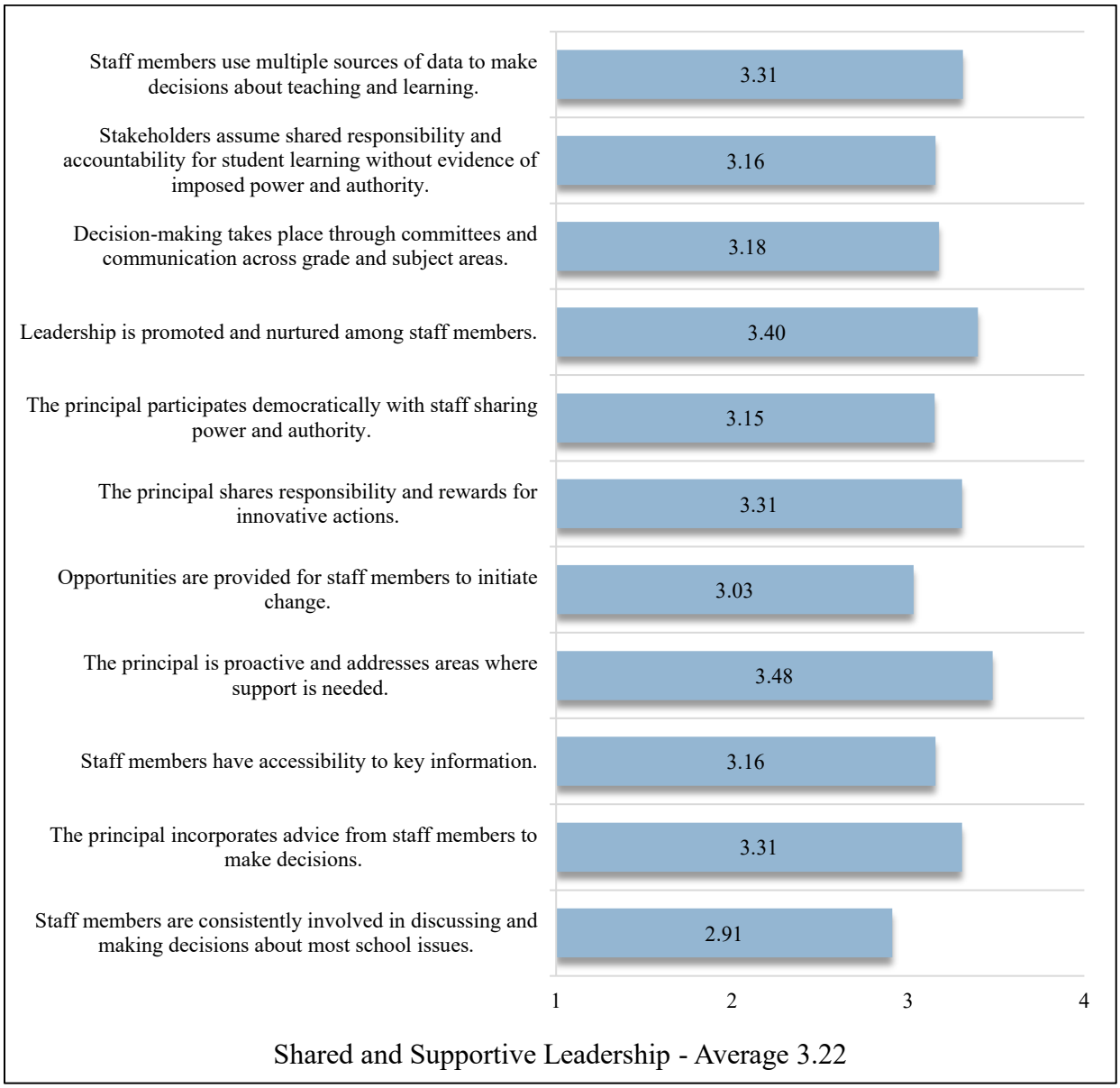
Figure 4 exhibits the mean score for each survey item and the overall mean for all survey items within the first PLC dimension, Shared and Supportive Leadership, for all participants. The survey items receiving the highest average score among all participants asked participants to assess how proactive the building principal is in providing support when needed. On the four-point Likert scale, this item received a mean score of 3.48. The second highest mean score of 3.40 was regarding leadership opportunities for staff members. The high scores on these two survey items reveal that there are campus practices in place that not only address supports that staff members need but also provides staff members opportunities to be leaders on campus.

The survey item with the lowest mean score for this dimension, 2.91, regarded the practices in place that provide staff members opportunities to be part of the decision-making

processes at the campuses.

Figure 4

Dimension 1 Mean Scores, for All Participants: Shared and Supportive Leadership



With a mean score of 3.03, the next lowest survey statement referred to staff members' ability to initiate change at their campuses. In comparison to the higher rated statements, these lower scoring statements show that although there may be campus practices in place that support

teachers and allow them to be leaders, these practices do not necessarily allow teachers to have a voice that allows for change to be initiated.

The mean score for all survey statements in this dimension was 3.22 on the four-point Likert scale. While there may still be opportunities for growth in this dimension at the participating campuses, this dimension is not a weakness.

Dimension 2: Shared Vision and Values

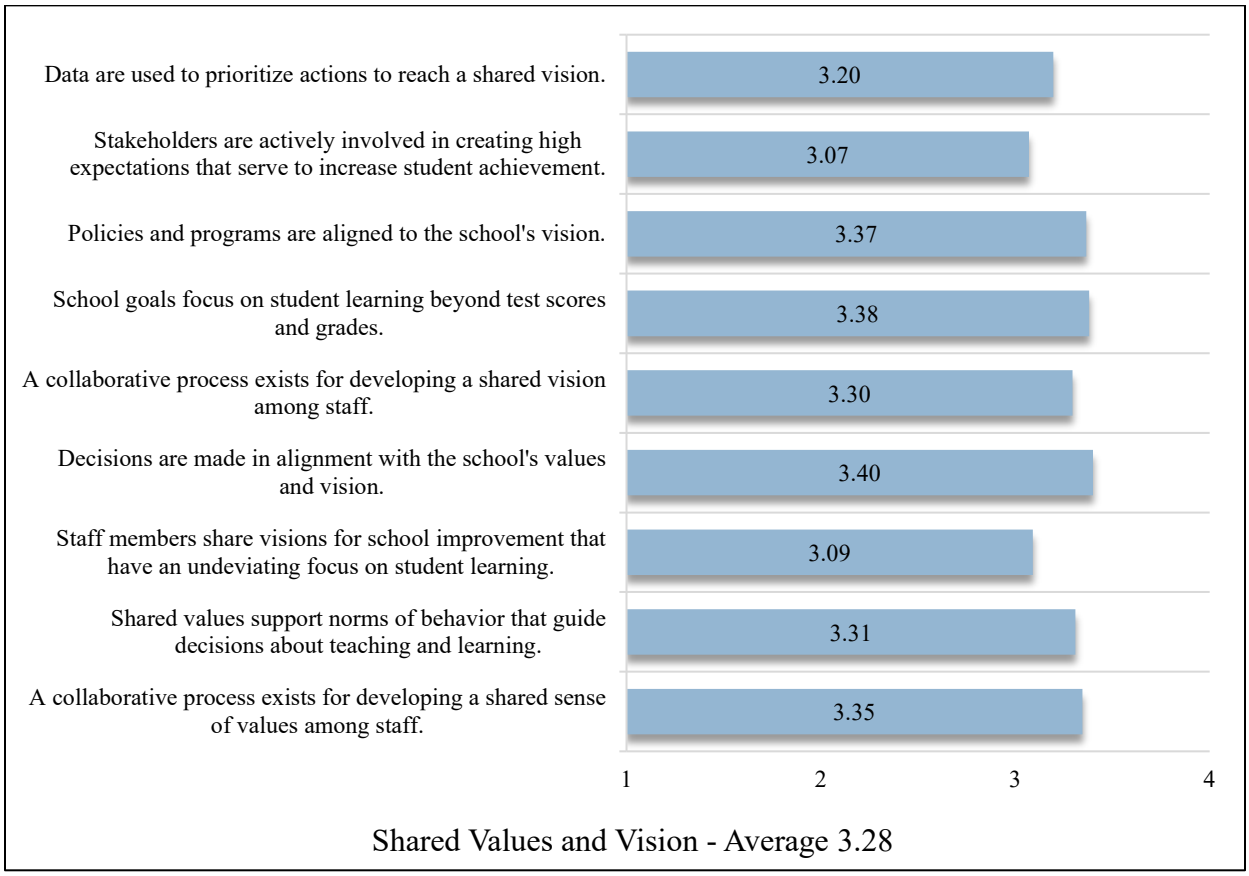
The average score for each survey statement and the overall average score for Dimension 2, Shared Values and Vision, are shown in Figure 5. The overall mean score for all survey statements for all participants for this dimension was 3.28. For all respondents, the survey item receiving the highest mean score, 3.40, assessed whether decisions made at the campus-level were congruent with the campus values and vision. The second highest mean score indicated whether campus goals were based more on student learning than test scores and grades; the mean score for this survey statement was 3.38. This was followed very closely by the item assessing how school policies and programs aligned with the campus vision, which had a mean score of 3.37. These three statements indicate relative strengths of the campuses. Per teachers' perceptions highlighted through these survey items, the practices and goals of the campus leaders are aligned with the campus' vision and values and test scores are not the only or most important measure of student success.

The lowest two survey items for this dimension both involve elements of student learning, although each item had mean scores above 3.0. The first, with a mean score of 3.07, assessed the role stakeholders played in helping to create expectations that lead to increased student achievement. The second lowest mean score of 3.09 was for the item that assessed how practices align to support campus staff members in sharing their visions for improvements that

focus on student learning. Although these survey items still scored relatively high mean scores on the four-point Likert scale, they show to be areas of needed growth for the campuses.

Figure 5

Dimension 2 Mean Scores, for All Participants: Shared Values and Vision



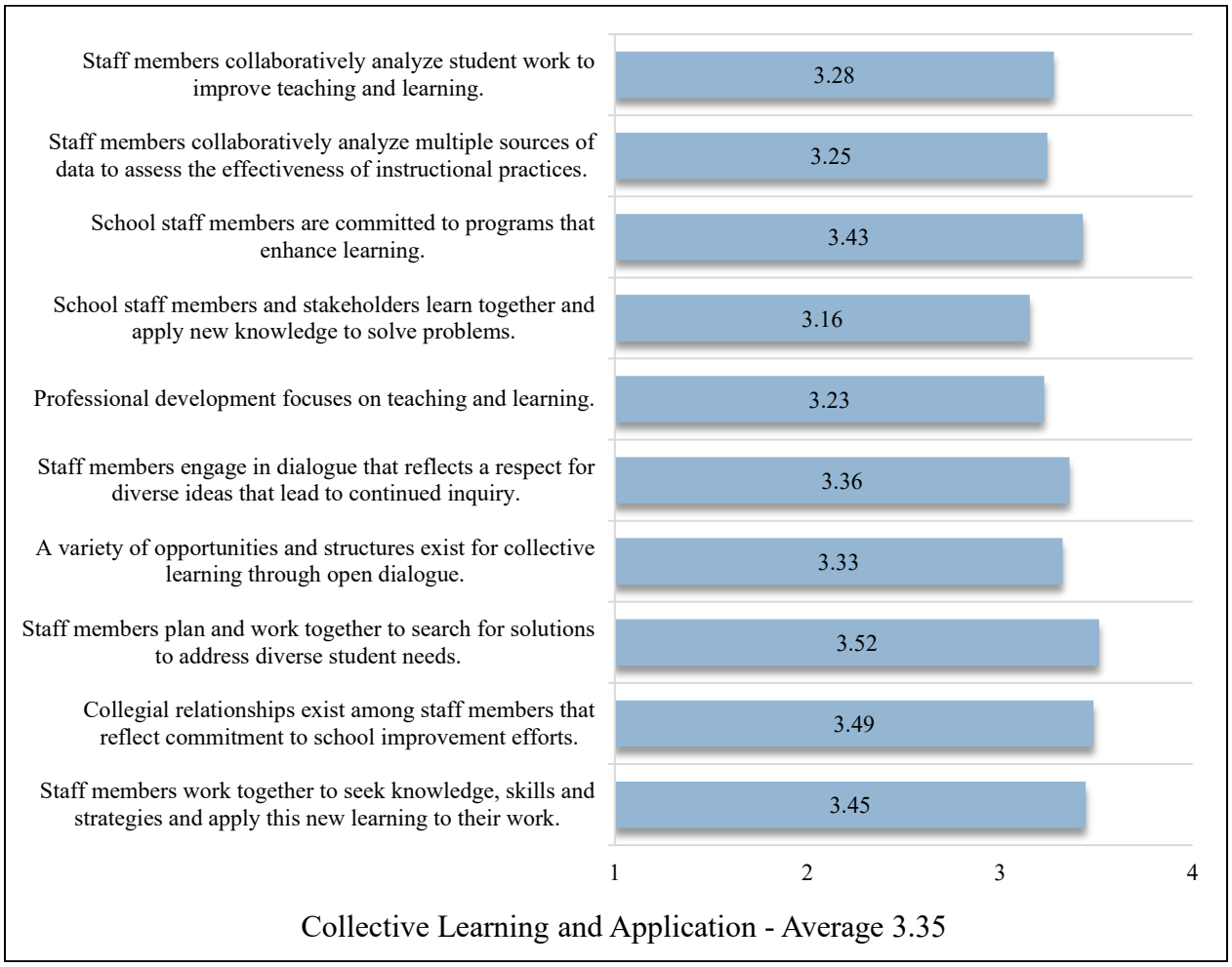
Dimension 3: Collective Learning and Application

Data for Dimension 3, Collective Learning and Application are presented in Figure 6. The survey statements with the two highest mean scores of 3.52 and 3.49 assessed the practices that support staff members' ability to work collaboratively to address students' needs and the presence of collegial relationships among staff members as evidence of shared commitment to efforts resulting in continuous school improvement. The high mean score of these items provides evidence that teachers feel as though they work collaboratively to address students' needs and

their close professional relationships reflect their dedication to school improvement.

Figure 6

Dimension 3 Mean Scores, for All Participants: Collective Learning and Application



With a mean score of 3.16, the survey item with the lowest average evaluated practices that allow for campus staff and all other stakeholders to learn and work collaboratively to address issues. The second lowest mean score was 3.23 for the item that gauged if professional learning opportunities were geared toward teaching and learning. Again, the mean scores for these lowest scoring survey items are above 3.0 on the four-point Likert scale, which indicates they are still relative strengths but there is room for improvement regarding collaborative efforts

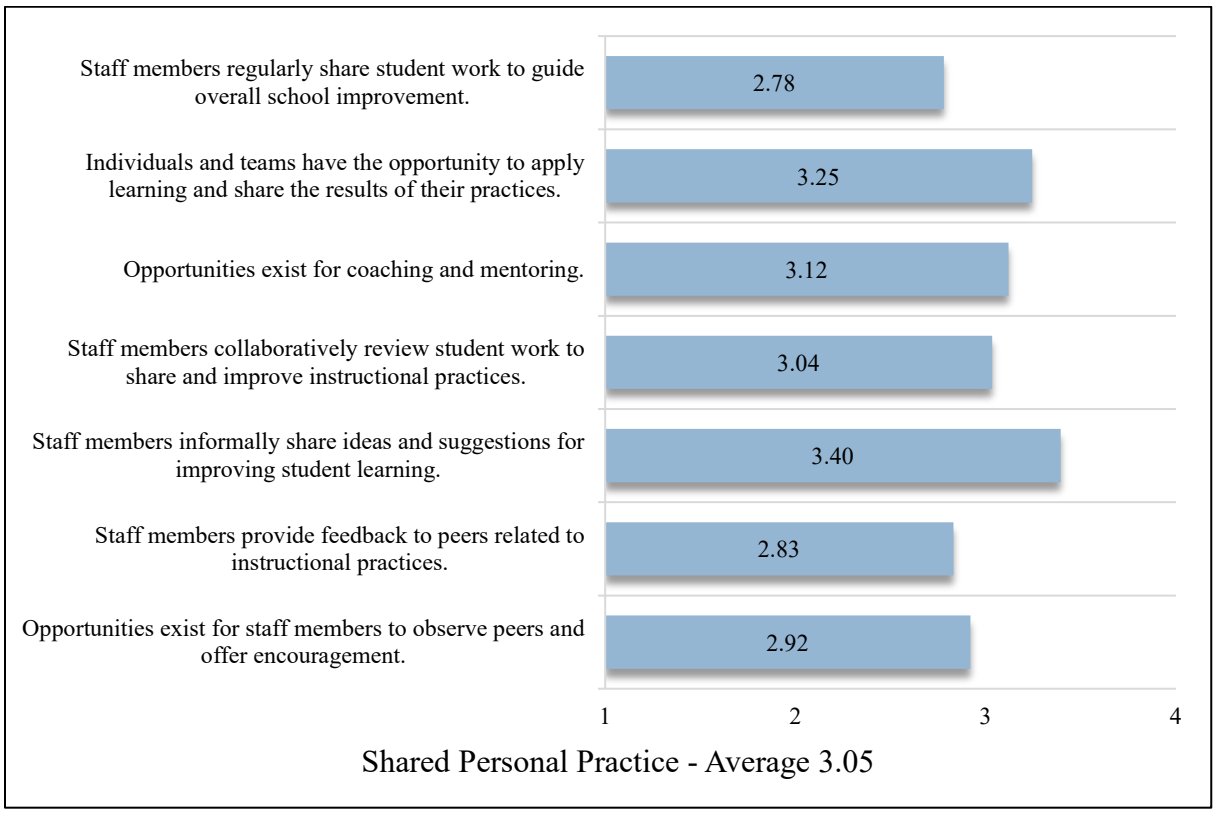
involving all staff and stakeholders and for teacher learning opportunities. The overall mean score for this dimension was 3.35.

Dimension 4: Shared Personal Practice

Data presented in Figure 7 are the mean scores for the seven survey statements for Dimension 4, Shared Personal Practice. Also shown is the average of all survey statements in the dimension for all participants, which was 3.05.

Figure 7

Dimension 4 Mean Scores, for All Participants: Shared Person Practice



The highest average score for this dimension was 3.40 for the survey item that assessed practices related to campus staff sharing ideas to improve student learning. The next highest mean score was 3.25 for the survey item regarding practices that support teachers and teacher teams using their learning and being able to share the outcomes of their implementation efforts.

The lowest mean score for a survey item in this dimension was 2.78 for the item that evaluated practices regarding opportunities for campus staff to use student work as data to inform school improvement efforts. The next lowest scoring survey item with a mean score of 2.83 assessed campus practices that allow campus staff to learn from each other through observation opportunities.

Dimension 5: Supportive Conditions

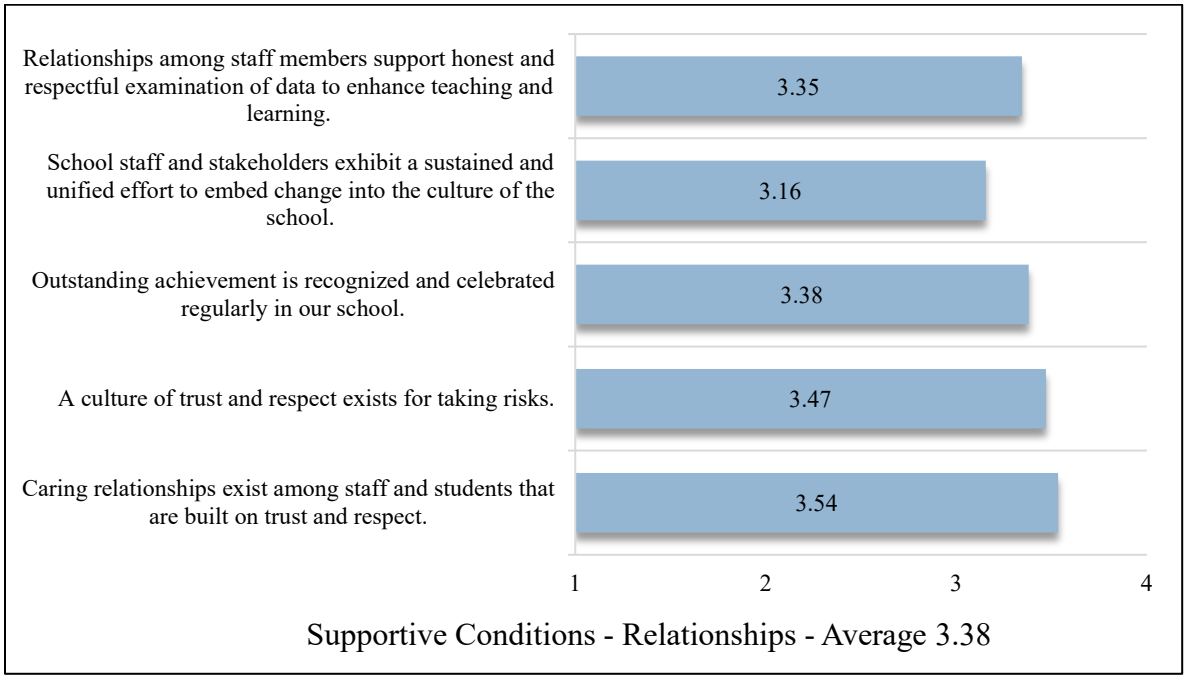
The survey data for Dimension 5 is separated into two categories: relationships and structures.

Relationship Category

The mean scores for each of the survey statements for all survey participants and the overall average for Dimension 5 are presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Dimension 5 Mean Scores, for All Participants: Supportive Conditions – Relationships



The highest mean score for this category of Dimension 5 was 3.54 for the survey item gauging staff and student relationships centered on trust and respect. On a four-point Likert scale this was a definite strength. The next highest mean score was 3.47 for the item that assessed campus culture regarding risk taking.

The lowest mean score for a survey item for this part of Dimension 5 was 3.16 for the item regarding change efforts by the staff and stakeholders as part of the campus culture. With an average score of 3.35, the second lowest scoring survey item for this dimension focused on practices that allow for honest and objective data analysis and the use of that information to impact teaching and learning. The overall mean score for all survey statements for this dimension was 3.38.

Supportive Conditions - Structures

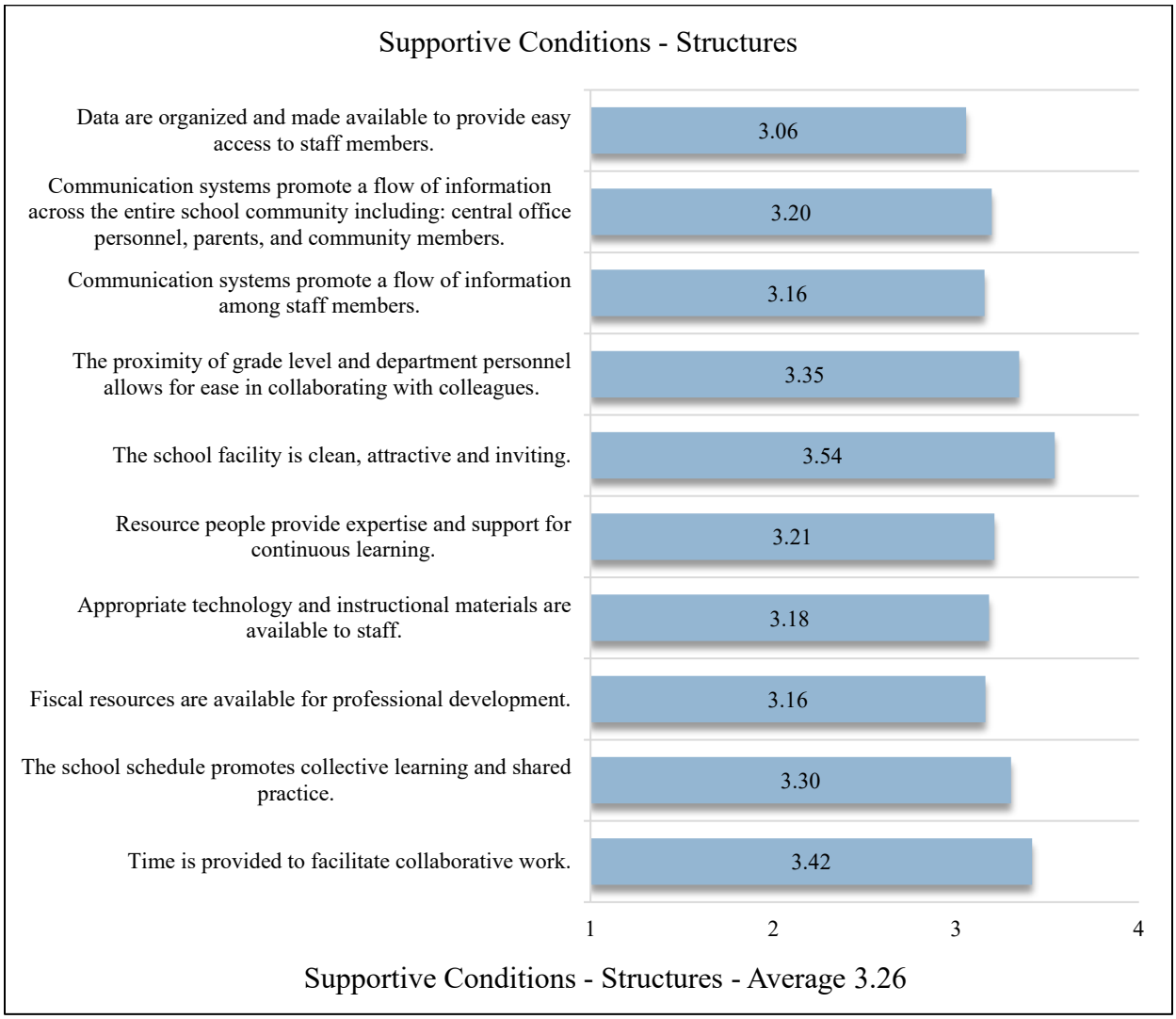
Data for the second part of Dimension 5, Supportive Conditions – Structures, is exhibited in Figure 9. For this subset of Dimension 5, the highest scoring survey item had a mean score of 3.54. This survey item assessed the physical appearance of the school building. As stated in Chapter 3, Hilltop ISD is a fast-growth district where most school buildings were built in 2003 and after. The high score on that item indicates that the buildings are maintained and cared for. With a mean score of 3.42, the second highest scoring survey item assessed campuses providing time for staff collaboration.

The lowest scoring survey item for this part of Dimension 5 indicates the accessibility of data for campus staff members. This item had a mean score of 3.06, which, although still not a weak score on the four-point Likert scale, indicates that accessing data is more of a challenge for staff members than other aspects of campus work. The next lowest mean score of 3.16 was present for two survey items. The first assessed communication practices that allow for easy

communication among staff members. The second survey item evaluated the availability of fiscal resources for staff learning. The overall mean score for this part of Dimension 5 was 3.26.

Figure 9

Dimension 5, Mean Scores, for All Participants: Supportive Conditions – Structures



The data presented thus far provide an overview of all participating teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of campus practices for each of the PLC dimensions. It is necessary to further examine the data by various subgroups to answer Research Question 1 more completely, and to determine if there are congruences or inconsistencies in the data that are

based on categorized subgroups. This analysis provides an understanding of teachers' perceptions of campus practices based on their total years of teaching experience, years of teaching experience within Hilltop ISD, and content area department.

Data in Table 3 are the mean scores for each of the PLC dimensions based upon respondents' total years teaching. Mean score for all PLC dimensions for 1-4 and 5-10 years of teaching were within 0.01 of each other. However, the mean scores for all PLC dimensions for teachers with 21> years of service was 3.02 which was at least 0.2 lower than the mean score of each of the other years-of-service subgroups. There are many factors that may contribute to this, including the concept of PLCs being a new initiative introduced during these teachers' career while teachers with 10 or fewer years of service may have worked with PLC processes and supports in place throughout the entirety of their career. Most of the mean scores for all PLC dimensions decreased as the years of teaching increased; when comparing the teachers with 1-4 years of teaching with teachers with 21> years of teaching, the mean scores for all PLC dimensions was greater for teachers with 1-4 years of teaching.

Table 3

Mean by Total Years of Teaching, for All Participants

Years teaching	Shared and Supportive Leadership	Shared Values and Vision	Collective Learning and Application	Shared Personal Practice	Supportive Conditions - Relationships	Supportive Conditions - Structures	Mean score for all PLC dimensions
1-4	3.34	3.5	3.35	3.00	3.60	3.28	3.35
5-10	3.22	3.36	3.45	3.14	3.50	3.34	3.34
11-20	3.22	3.22	3.28	3.04	3.33	3.24	3.22
21>	3.05	3.03	3.10	2.77	3.10	3.05	3.02

When categorized by years of teaching, the highest mean score in all the data was 3.6 on the four-point Likert scale in the PLC dimension Supportive Conditions – Relationships for those

with 1-4 years of teaching experience. This implies that these teachers may perceive that practices have been put in place to support trusting and respectful relationships among staff members. The lowest average score for any subgroup within this category was 2.77 for the dimension Shared Personal Practice by teachers who had 21> years of teaching experience. This could indicate that these teachers feel this is an area of growth for their campus in terms of strengthening practices that allow teachers to share learning and practices with each other to improve student learning.

The data presented in Table 4 are the average scores for each of the PLC dimensions by teachers' years of teaching in Hilltop ISD. The highest mean score across all data in this set was 3.5 for the Supportive Conditions – Relationships PLC dimension for teachers who had 1-4 years of teaching experience in the district. This indicates that these teachers perceive there to be practices in place that support relationships built on trust and respect. These data are similar to the data presented previously where this PLC dimension also had the highest mean score for those teachers with 1-4 years total teaching experience.

Table 4

Mean by Years Teaching in Hilltop ISD, for All Participants

Years in teaching district	Shared and supportive leadership	Shared values and visions	Collective learning and application	Shared personal practice	Supportive conditions - Relationships	Supportive conditions - Structures	Mean score for all PLC dimensions
1-4	3.27	3.39	3.46	3.22	3.50	3.36	3.37
5-10	3.09	3.17	3.24	2.90	3.28	3.07	3.13
11-20	3.22	3.18	3.23	2.87	3.32	3.29	3.19
21>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The data for teachers with 5-10 years of teaching experience in the school district exhibits the lowest overall mean score for all PLC dimensions. The lowest mean score for a single PLC

dimension was 2.87 for the Shared Personal Practice dimension for teachers with 11-20 years of teaching experience in Hilltop ISD. There were zero teachers who completed the survey who had 21 or more years teaching experience in Hilltop ISD, although 10 teachers had 21> total years of teacher experience. While still not a considerable weak score based on the four-point Likert scale, this indicates that these teachers perceive the practices related to being able to learn from and share expertise with others is an area that may benefit from some refinements.

The data in Table 5 are the mean scores for each PLC dimension and the overall mean score for all PLC dimensions by teaching department. With a mean score of 3.48, the teachers within the science departments scored both the Collective Learning and Application and the Supportive Conditions – Relationships PLC dimensions with the highest mean score. The survey items in both PLC dimensions included statements that focused on staff member collaboration and relationships, areas teachers perceive to be relative strengths at the participating campuses. The teachers within the mathematics and social studies departments also scored these two PLC dimensions the highest with mathematics teachers scoring a mean of 3.28 and social studies teachers scoring 3.37 for both dimensions. The social studies department had the highest overall average, 3.33, for all dimensions.

Table 5

Mean by Teacher Content Area by PLC Dimension

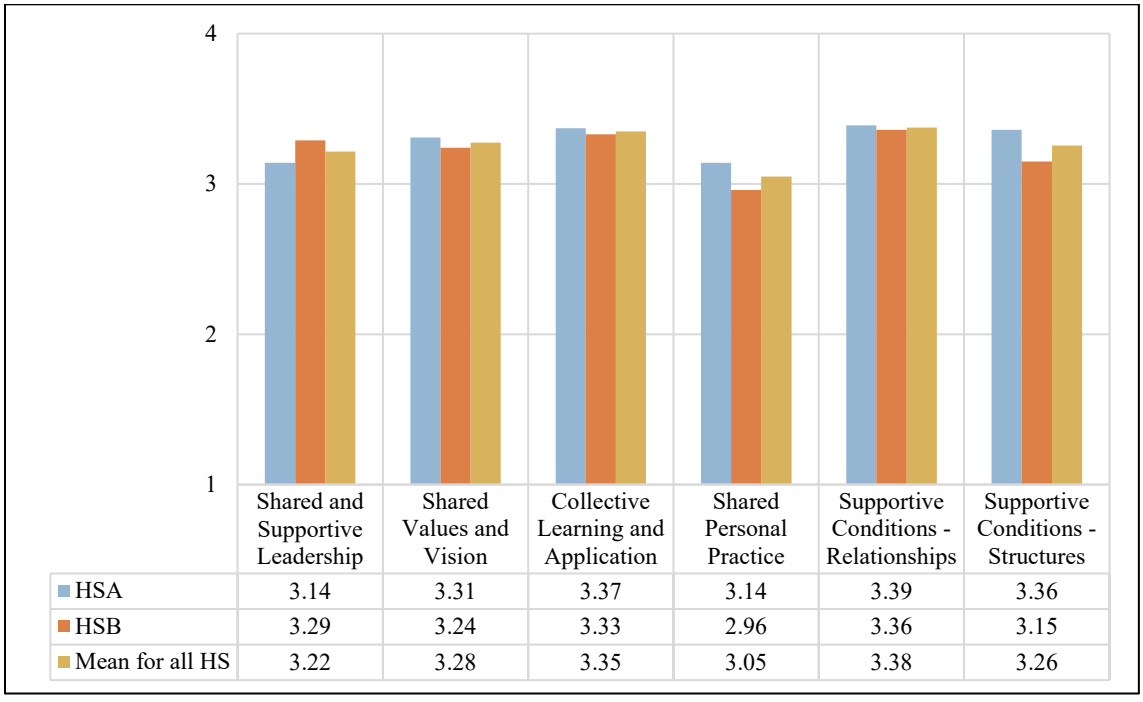
Department	Shared and Supportive Leadership	Shared Values and Vision	Collective Learning and Application	Shared Personal Practice	Supportive Conditions - Relationships	Supportive Conditions - Structures	Mean Score for All PLC Dimensions
English	3.19	3.19	3.21	2.82	3.35	3.15	3.15
Math	3.04	3.16	3.28	2.90	3.28	3.13	3.13
Science	3.23	3.39	3.48	2.97	3.48	3.33	3.31
Social Studies	3.33	3.29	3.37	3.31	3.37	3.32	3.33

The content area department with the lowest overall mean score for all dimensions was mathematics. The lowest mean score for any PLC dimension was 2.82 for the Shared Personal Practice dimension; this mean was scored by teachers within the English departments at the participating campuses. This average score is not necessarily low on the four-point Likert scale but is relatively low compared to other average scores presented. This is congruent with data presented in other subgroups that indicated the English teachers also perceive the practices in place to support teachers in the areas of sharing ideas, providing feedback and suggestions to each other, and sharing student work to improve their instructional practices could be stronger. The teachers within the mathematics and science departments also scored Shared Personal Practice as the lowest PLC dimension.

Figure 10 shows the how the survey results for each of the participating campuses compared for each of the PLC dimensions.

Figure 10

Mean Score Comparison by Campus



	Shared and Supportive Leadership	Shared Values and Vision	Collective Learning and Application	Shared Personal Practice	Supportive Conditions - Relationships	Supportive Conditions - Structures
HSA	3.14	3.31	3.37	3.14	3.39	3.36
HSB	3.29	3.24	3.33	2.96	3.36	3.15
Mean for all HS	3.22	3.28	3.35	3.05	3.38	3.26

The standard deviations for the mean scores for each PLC dimension for the two participating campuses were 0.11, 0.05, 0.03, 0.13, 0.02, 0.11 respectively. These data indicate that there was a high level of consistency among the answers for teachers at both participating campuses. The teachers' perceptions between the two campuses were very comparable, which is important when looking at the data in a combined format to ensure it appropriately represents the teachers' perceptions at both campuses.

The quantitative data presented helped to answer Research Question 1. The data also provided a statistical view of teachers' perceptions of campus practices which support PLC teams. The data in the next qualitative section provide in-depth context to the quantitative data.

Qualitative Analysis Results

The qualitative data collection consisted of 18 one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted virtually via Zoom™. Of those 18 interviews, six were with the two principals plus two additional campus administrators identified by the principal as those who work most closely with or have knowledge of campus PLCs on their respective campus. Teacher interview data were the basis of the qualitative data to answer Research Question 1: What campus administrators' actions support PLC teams as perceived by teachers? Teacher interviews were conducted with core-content teachers from both campuses. Teacher PLC teams were identified through the survey data from responses that were either very congruent with or very divergent from the mean scores of the PLC dimensions. All teachers on the PLC team were recruited via email to participate in a one-on-one interview via Zoom. Of the 25 total teachers who were recruited via email, six from each campus agreed to participate in an interview. The teachers are referred to as T1 – T12 for the purposes of this study. Interviews took between 19 and almost 41 minutes to complete. The interview protocols for all teacher interviews can be found in

Appendix F. Each interview was conducted virtually via Zoom to adhere to safety protocols due to COVID-19 precautions. With participant permission, interviews were audio recorded using the Rev© application on a smartphone. For member checking purposes, once an interview was transcribed, the transcript was emailed to the corresponding participant to review, correct, or amend, as necessary. Then the transcriptions were uploaded to Atlas.ti© software. For the first order analysis, the written transcripts from all one-on-one interviews were thoroughly reviewed and coded using open coding, and for the second order analysis, recurring categories were determined based on the data. Codes were then collapsed into emergent themes. Data from the transcripts were analyzed and compared with survey data.

Research Question 1 Qualitative Data

There are two main components of qualitative data. The first component comes from teacher interviews to answer Research Question 1. The second component includes perceptions of campus principals, to answer Research Question 2.

Teacher Perceptions of PLC Purpose

It was beneficial to gain an understanding of teachers' beliefs regarding the purpose of PLCs as a context to understanding the rest of their interview responses. All 12 teachers provided multiple purposes for PLC teams. The most frequent response was teacher planning time. Responses categorized as "planning" included statements such as "…a place for us to plan for the coming week in terms of lessons or grading or what we're going to take as grades" (T2), "collaboration to make sure that people are pulling their weight" (T5), "making sure we're all doing the same thing" (T6), and to "…provide good, interactive lessons following generally staying in line with district scope and sequence and meeting grade minimums as far as a number

of major grades and minor grades" (T12). Most of the teachers who provided these responses also provided additional descriptors of the purpose of PLCs as well, not just planning.

Teachers' second most frequent descriptor for the purpose of PLC teams was "to impact student learning." T7 stated "Having different perspectives and outlooks grows you as a teacher. It exposes you to different ideas that ultimately determine what is best for the student learning. Our end goal is what is best for the student…". T1 described the purpose of PLC teams as "promoting increased student learning outcomes", and T10 said "…ensure that all students are learning… [and to] make sure that everything is equitable as far as how it is being delivered to the students."

Analyzing assessment data and using the results to inform future practices were also purposes of PLC teams presented by teachers. T11 said, "Teachers are utilizing the four questions of the PLC, so they can make sure that the students are actually learning and mastering the material." T4 stated that for their team they "bring data and things that we've struggled with, and things that we've noticed with our students, so that we can intervene earlier rather than later."

Other purposes of PLC teams presented by teachers included opportunities for teachers to learn from each other (T1), to brainstorm and share ideas with each other (T4), to reflect (T9), and to have a safe group to go to for help (T2).

Teacher Perceptions of Administrator's Role in PLC Teams

It was then helpful to identify teachers' beliefs regarding campus administrator roles in PLC teams. Interview Questions 5 and 6 asked teachers to identify their perception of the campus administrator's role in a recent PLC team meeting and their overall perception of the purpose of an administrator attending PLC meetings. Several themes emerged regarding this topic.

- *Theme 1.* The first theme was that the administrator serves as an unbiased member of the PLC team. As stated by T1:

> The biggest thing for me is that they're a neutral third party…. when you're a member of the team and you have your own interests and the other team members, they don't necessarily see you as objective. And there are times that's difficult, there are times where we all have our own students and so we know that ultimately, we're responsible for our students and we want to do what's right and best for our students. So, you get in this collective rut where there's some times you need that objective third party to be there to say, "All right, well why don't we try this and then we can come back, and we see how it goes."

T11 echoes T1's thoughts.

> Also, it's nice because the administrator is not really part of the team since they are not there every time. They are neutral, and they really come in with an outside perspective of what's best for students. Sometimes teachers get caught up in the planning and in our content work and we begin to take criticism from our teammates personally. So, it's nice when the administrators can come in and provide a really objective perspective on things.

- *Theme 2*. The second theme that emerged from the teacher responses was that administrators played a role in PLCs to make sure that teams were compliant in terms of meeting campus expectations regarding PLC processes and district and campus expectations regarding curriculum and grading. T11 described the administrator's role in a recent PLC meeting.

> The administrator was making sure that (a) we were meeting, and (b) that we were actually staying focused on the task at hand and not getting sidetracked, because there were a lot of issues with that team not being effective in that way.

Teachers commented that it is helpful at times when the administrator can be the person on the team who reminds the team of the campus expectations so the team can continue to move forward. T8 stated, "If you can have an admin come in there and just express from their position, the expectations of the campus, that helps things move smoothly and it did help us and help us get back on track," and he wished that the administrator would have stepped up sooner in that instance so the team could have gotten back on track in a timelier manner. T1 discussed that at

times he perceived that it was difficult for administrators to separate being part of a PLC team in a supportive role from being an evaluator.

> This is where it gets sticky because of the nature of our administrators being our T-TESS evaluators is that I think sometimes it's hard for administrators to separate that…They [teachers] withdraw when administrators are around. So it's innate when we tie it to the evaluation system.

- *Theme 3.* All 12 teachers who participated in the interviews stated that when administrators are part of the PLC team, they perceived the administrator's role to include being a support for the team. The support described by teachers took several forms, including simply checking in to see if the team needed anything, observing and listening to the team work, furthering the team's thinking through questioning, or offering ideas or suggestions. T11 offered his perception of the administrator's role with his PLC team.

> That standpoint of support and asking the right questions and making sure that we are heading in the right direction, instead of just telling, "Here's what you guys should do," then it's really effective. And that's the type of support that teachers, at least what I want, it's not very effective when an administrator comes in and they're not the ones in the classroom, they're not the ones teaching. They're not the ones dealing with the classroom management issues and they come in and they're the expert and they know what we should be doing. And then they try to tell us exactly what we should do.

T10 provided an example of an administrator's actions in a recent PLC meeting that he perceived to be supportive of their work, especially as they were a new team working with a new curriculum.

> The AP started asking us questions, "Well, could they show it with this, and could they show it with that instead?" And so that helped us kind of broaden, and then she started asking questions along the lines of, "Okay, well, what is kind of the direct teach skills that they would need to know ahead of time going into the project"? Then, "What sort of checkpoint?"...She shared an example of a project that she had done that was similar in, not in content, but in process. And that was helpful, but mainly questions, she saved suggestions until the end.

Teacher Perceptions of Existing Supports for PLC Teams

Interview Question 4 asked teachers to identify aspects or resources at their campus they felt were helpful and supportive of their PLC teams. When these are related back to the conceptual framework and the five PLC dimensions, the most cited supports identified by teachers would be categorized in the Collective Learning and Application and the Supportive Conditions dimensions. The supports identified may not be initiated or implemented within a PLC team meeting by an administrator; however, campus administrators are responsible for ensuring these supports are available for their campus staff.

- *Theme 1: Support of professional learning opportunities.* Within the Collective Learning and Application dimension, T10 discussed the campus professional development regarding PLCs that took place at their campus.

> During professional learning during our first week of PD, we went over to the four PLC questions. What the PLC process looks like. We talked about what it is, what it is not versus kind of coming from other campuses where they're doing that PLC light version and what it really should look like here at our campus.

T10 further described how professional learning related to the four PLC questions was then on-going throughout the year, so it was not just a once-a-year training that was soon forgotten by staff members. These learning opportunities took place during the school day which they liked because then teachers did not have to give up personal time before or after school to continue their learning. T9 discussed that it was helpful when teachers got to attend job-embedded learning sessions with their teams. It gave them the opportunity to discuss how they would implement the learning in their classrooms.

- *Theme 2: Support of time.* The greatest amount of data regarding what teachers perceived to be supportive of their PLC work was aligned with the Supportive Conditions PLC

dimension. The first supportive condition identified was the common planning time that was built into the school day. T11 provided perspective as to why the common planning time was so important.

> Other campuses or other districts who do not have that built in time, it just becomes something that gets put on the back burner, because it then becomes one extra thing that the teachers have to do on their own time. When you make the teachers choose between, this is either we're taking away from your family time and your kids, and where you're going to have to make the choice of being here for ours, it creates a lot of issues with the school culture.

T1 echoed this same sentiment: “Common planning time is about respecting teachers’ time but also emphasizing that it sends a message that, as a campus, this is what we do”.

- *Theme 3: Support of instructional coaches.* Teachers also identified the support of the IC as being beneficial. T12 discussed the role of the IC with their PLC team.

> We have an instructional coach that does come in from time to time, and their job is to make sure that we're doing the things that we're supposed to be doing to meet campus goals and also to help us with ideas, brainstorming as far as lessons if that is needed. We also meet with them after major assessments, like a test, to break down data. They go through and talk about what went well, what maybe needs improvement.

T11 talked about the importance of having their IC be part of their PLC meetings to make sure they are focused and do not become complacent.

> I also think the biggest component too, is having the ICs that come in and make sure that we are operating at a functional level in our PLC and it's not a waste of anyone's time. And it's asking the right questions to make sure that we are having that self-reflection too, of, Are we really doing what's best for kids? Are we really focused as a PLC and are we functioning as an effective PLC?

The campus digital learning coach (DLC) and librarian were also identified by teachers as a meaningful support of their PLC work. T9 described what the support from their DLC and librarian look like on their campus.

> Our librarian will email us and say "Hey, this is a resource we've seen, or something that somebody mentioned, or that we came across," or whatever it may be, to try and reach out and let us know those things. Our DLC, he's really good about, he'll do walks in the

> morning sometimes before school and just check on people and ask how things are going…I think they've gotten so good at sharing, that then they reach out with good resources that other people have mentioned. But then a lot of times it is us when we're sitting there talking or planning and we know we want to do something big, or we know when to do something that's more tech oriented, more project based, whatever it may be, to reach out to them. I think they just have that big picture idea, that they're able to look at, where we're always coming from that curriculum standpoint and feeling that attachment knowing, "Oh, I still got to get them this information." You can get bogged down in what you've done before or feeling like you've got to get this content where they can look at it from that instructional, top-down look. Maybe provide some insight that we didn't really think about…Sometimes that fresh look makes a big difference.

T7 explained, "So, if we are wanting to branch out and do something new, then they're [the DLC] like, give me what you got, and I'll come up with something creative and fun for you."

- *Theme 4: Support of campus administrators.* Support from campus administrators was also important to teachers as they work with their PLC teams. T5 felt that one way that administrators supported teachers and PLC work on their campus was through their open communication and making sure that teachers were aware of campus and district initiatives or expectations.

> I think anything that's new, anything that's a buzzword that's coming into the vernacular of the district, Dr. Gray is always really good and Ms. Zurek, the associate, they're always really good about getting those things out, "Hey, look, this is what grading might look like from now on."

T9 also recognized that although their AP may not be a content specialist, she still finds ways to support the PLC teams.

> I think at least for our AP, she really tries to get in and answer questions where she can. She recognizes her limitations on a curriculum front, but there's a lot of times that she's got some things that we need, or some information that we need, or permissions that we need, things like that.

Teacher Perception of Needed Supports

- *Theme 1: Administrator visibility.* Teachers also identified several supports they felt were lacking or things they wanted from their administrators that would help their PLC teams. A

sentiment that was shared by 8 of the 12 teachers interviewed was the importance of campus administrators being visible in the hallways and around the campus and in PLC meetings. T4 described why he feels that campus administrators being visible is so important.

> My supervisor does an incredible job where she just walks the halls during passing period and just like, “Hey, how's your day going” and just create like a welcoming spirit. That's not about, well, your kids doing this, are they, are you sure you want to do that? Just like I care about you as a coworker. And it makes it easier for me to just drop in to her office when I need to. So, building that personal relationship that's not based on our performance.

T6 shared how campus administrators being the in the hallways allows teachers to see them often and not be fearful when an administrator comes to talk to them.

> I especially like when the principal walks down the hallway. I'm usually afraid that I am in trouble. That she's coming to me to tell me that I do something wrong because I'm not used to seeing her. So, I think that again, like they would walk around and chat and…pop in my classroom in the morning and say hi.

When it comes to administrators participating as part of PLC teams, T9 related this idea back to the goals and vision of the campus, but also acknowledged that administrators having time to be visible and participate is sometimes out of their hands.

> I feel like it's really hard to have a pulse on your school if you're not in the PLC meetings and in the classroom when you can. I think that's really hard in Frisco, especially. I feel like it's a system that really, with size of the school, and the number of tasks that are going on, and the number of the meetings and the trainings, and administrators are getting pulled in so many ways. I think our structure makes it really difficult to know what's going on really well.

T10 shared this same idea but added that an administrator being visible in a PLC meeting needed to be commonplace.

> [Administrators] coming to a PLC consistently is one action, because sometimes if it's not consistent and they pop in, you are kind of taken aback and you're like, "Oh, why are they here?" Where if you kind of establish that kind of culture where they're always popping in, it's almost weird if they don't pop in.

T6 succinctly summed up the ideas that several teachers shared when he stated, “Admin presence

needs to be normalized in a PLC planning situation in a low stakes environment."

- *Theme 2: Clear PLC expectations.* Another emergent theme regarding what teachers perceived would be helpful to their teams was campus administrators setting clear expectations for the PLC culture and processes on their campus. This theme most closely aligns with the Shared Vision and Values PLC dimension. T1 discussed the need to revisit this idea every year because of turnover. A high school campus in Hilltop ISD may have approximately 120 teachers, so inevitability there will be turnover each year. He stated that it is essential that administrators,

> …understand[ing] that there's turnover on the staff every year. So just because we spent a whole year doing this, we can't just continue it the next year, we have to assume that we may have 10, 15, 20 new staff members and they are coming in with their own PLC experiences from where they came from.

T1 also tied this idea back to the importance of the campus vision and how the work of PLC team supports that vision.

> … every year, "Hey, this is what we do, here are the structures that we have in place, these are our expectations." I think that norming as a campus at the beginning of the year is something that shows that intentionality to say, "Hey, here's what we believe in." But everybody is invested, the teachers are part of creating those norms.

- *Theme 3: PLC Resources.* The need for resources was a theme that emerged from the teacher interview data. This theme aligns with the PLC dimension, Supportive Conditions. Several different types of resources were mentioned, including a defined PLC process chart or script, an organized central location to find needed resources, and the need for content-specific resources. T2 described that "having a checklist or I think just kind of like something to guide our PLCs" or a "guiding script" would help their team to make sure they are doing everything they need and would help them to be more productive.

T4 explained that oftentimes there are so many resources for teachers to choose from that it can be overwhelming. T4 felt it would be beneficial for campus administrators to:

> …collect[ing] resources without pushing resources. Instead of the constant, this is what you need to do now, and then try this next and do this, just having a place for us. And then, in those PLC times when they're there, or when you reach out say, I've collected six options for you. Do you think one of these fits? Think of using them as a resource, that's something that's a hard balance without feeling like they're pushing us to do everything different.

T11 mentioned that campus administrator asking what resources teachers needed was encouraging, but administrators had to make sure to follow through on their offering of support.

> When an administrator comes in and says, "Okay, well, what do you need for support? What do you need from me? Do you need me to pull this data for you? Do you need me to do this?" That there is that follow through, because administrators get busy and sometimes that can become a back-burner task, but follow through is always great, especially when we're needing resources.

Research Question 2 Qualitative Data

The next section presents campus administrator interview data to address Research Question 2: How do campus administrators perceive their support of PLC teams? All six campus administrators who were initially recruited to participate in an interview did participate. The campus administrators are referred to as CA1 through CA6 for the purposes of this study. The campus administrator interview protocol (Appendix H) was used in all six campus administrator interviews. The same interview and data collection protocol used in the teacher interviews were also utilized for campus administrator interviews, including the use of Zoom, Rev.com®, and Atlas.ti©. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 54 minutes in length. Interviews were then transcribed using Rev.com. Each interview transcript was emailed to the interviewee for member checking. All qualitative data from campus administrator responses were categorized, emergent themes were analyzed, and results are reported below.

Administrator Perceptions of PLC Purpose

Before attempting to understand campus administrators' perception of their support of PLC teams, it was helpful to discover their beliefs regarding the purpose of PLC teams on their

campuses. Three of the six campus administrators discussed the need for PLC teams to consider and respond to the four PLC questions presented by DuFour et al. (2016). CA1 described the purpose of working through these questions as a PLC team.

> PLCs are really important in order to answer the four questions, right? What are we teaching? Are we teaching what we're supposed to be teaching? In alignment with that, and I think that we need to focus on this more even as an educational system, is looking at the TEK and making sure that we're addressing the TEK, the right standard. How do we know if they [students] know it? What kind of formative and summative assessments are we using? Then, what do we do if they know it? What do we do if they don't know it? It's really creating a common language, in my opinion, on the campus, making sure that we're teaching what we need to be doing, making sure that our students are learning and adjusting as needed.

CA2 also explained the importance of focusing on the four PLC questions so that teams keep sight of the bigger picture and refrain from only working to fill in a calendar.

> I want to see teachers really talk about lessons. I want to see them opening up lessons and really either let's create things from scratch, let's tweak what we have, but let's really focus on the how are we going to teach kids? What do we want them to understand? What is the outcome of the lesson going to be? And really diving into that in PLC, those are the things that I really want to see and not just calendar.

Five of the six campus administrators discussed the importance of disaggregating and analyzing data in PLC teams to be able to respond to student needs. CA6 described the role of data analysis in the PLC teams on his campus.

> The goal part, there are specific items that we asked that they accomplish within their PLC that include identifying the data that they're able to pull from formative assessments and talking and discussing about what it is that they're seeing, really showing that data up and being able to respond to what it is they need to do after they've analyzed that data.

Additionally, CA5 offered a description of what he is looking for when PLC teams analyze data to inform practices if students may not have performed proficiently.

> I think, probably the most important part of PLCs with the intervention piece and using your data to reteach or reassess or whatever, spiral in, the team's got to get together and look at that data together and then decide, "Okay, how do we do this? Okay, how do we integrate this? How do we plan this?" If they're going to have some kind of targeted tutorial or something, they've got to be able to, as a team, come up with a plan so that it's

> not one person trying to... It's just, divide and conquer…putting their minds together is so much better.

This same idea was also expressed by CA2 when he discussed reflection as part of the process PLC teams should enact as they consider the PLC questions.

> We need to look at the data and determine what's our [the teachers'] strengths? What's our weaknesses? And then what do we need to do with those weaknesses to improve them? Not just say, "Okay, next year, we're going to teach this better." But what can we do now to fix the areas?

In addition to the four PLC questions, campus administrators also described other purposes of PLC teams on their campuses. One of these included PLC teams addressing campus goals. CA3 explained that one of their campus goals is centered upon creating a safe social and emotional environment in which students can learn.

> With regard to goals, I would say when we talk about that experience that we want students to have, that safe and equitable inclusive experience that creates those future ready learning experiences for kids that they can then transport into their secondary goals. We have to provide the similar or same experience to kids in every classroom, but that starts with PLC teams.

CA6 discussed the importance of professional learning and how that can be accomplished with PLC teams.

> Now there are periodic things that we give those PLCs to do, like have a discussion about the role of standards-based grading within this meeting. "Will you guys please take five minutes to watch this video and then have a discussion about what this means to you guys?" So, we did that with the DuFour video, and then we said, "Okay, we're going to push this out to the teams we ask them have a conversation…" So, it's an opportunity here to also continue that job embedded learning that needs to be happening during those PLCs as well.

In an analogy that stuck with her from a PLC training, CA4 encapsulated many of the ideas shared by campus administrators regarding the purpose of PLCs.

> The way I see PLC is it is the vehicle that drives the work that we're trying to do...The first time I was trained in PLCs was like 2005, and the way it was described to me at that time, and it really stuck and made a lot of sense to me, is PLC is not another thing on the plate. PLC is the plate, and all the other things go on it. PLC is the structure that

> supports...Like I said, it's the vehicle that drives to the destination. PLC is not the destination. It's how you get to all of the places that you're going to. So just that analogy of the plate has always stuck with me.

Campus Administrator Perceptions of Their Role in PLC Teams

Once campus administrators' understanding of the purpose of PLCs had been described, Interview Questions 6 and 7 focused on what principals perceived their role to be when working with PLC teams. After the data were coded and categorized, the following themes emerged to represent what administrators viewed to be their role within a PLC. The three themes that emerged were listening and questioning, having difficult conversations, and brainstorming or offering ideas.

- *Theme 1*. In campus administrator data regarding their role on PLC teams, the first theme that emerged was listening and questioning. Four of the six campus administrators described how being in PLC team meetings was important so they could listen to the teachers' conversations and ask questions to push teacher thinking. CA2 offered an example of a recent PLC meeting that he attended.

> My role that I took in that meeting was more of probing questions where they would kind of get into discussions and my conversations would be more probing. I would kind of sit back and ask, "Okay, well, what if? What do we think about? What is this going to look like? Have we thought about?"…I didn't want to come right back out and say, "You guys need to do X, Y, and Z." So, my questions were more kind of probing and guiding questions.

CA3 highlighted the importance of participating in a team meeting in a supportive manner versus having more of an authoritarian presence.

> I'm not there to ask questions in a derogatory way or it's just more of sort of getting them to think of maybe connections that they wouldn't think of because they're so far entrenched in things or asking lesson plans down…Maybe reframing questions in a different light than what they're looking at right now.

CA6 also discussed the need for campus administrators to listen to the PLC team members to gauge how the team was functioning and what needs they may have.

> You don't want to come in with bullets firing. You just want to have some questions, but you need to listen first. Right? Always listen and then reflect on what's going on, but then ask questions in order to guide the conversation going forward. If there is an issue or you see something that needs to be addressed, start with questions because ultimately, it's not a meeting for us, it's a meeting for them. So, we have to be super reflective and good listeners in those meetings, if at all possible, unless there's obvious conflicts.

- *Theme 2.* Having difficult conversations was the second emergent theme from the campus administrator interview data. The campus administrator participants discussed their role in PLC teams as a mediator or a neutral or unbiased third party. They described situations when they attended PLC meetings to help a team revisit or reevaluate their norms or to keep a team moving forward to not get stuck. CA2 described a situation where he had to help a team get back on-track.

> I had a team last year where I had to go in and we had to start from scratch. We had to re-norm from the very beginning. And that was simply because we had a teacher on that team that was always a singleton. And she came from a district that did not follow a PLC model. So, it was just really helping her to understand what we're doing, why we're doing it and that helped the other teammates understand that this is not the background she's from. So, we're going to have to all figure out really how to work together and coordinate some things cohesively.

CA3 had a similar situation with a struggling team that needed help from the administrator to function as an effective group, so he had to support them with their group norms.

> This specific team has struggled with norms. We've had to revisit norms; we've had to reset this year. That's what I've called them. Where maybe people get catty with one another or someone has an unspoken expectation of someone else and they didn't know that. And so, I started it with this PLC, and they do it now. Now recently, they've started doing it with each other, but in this PLC, I'm sort of being like, "Hey, what norm does that help support?" I sometimes will reframe things in the supporting or making sure to keep us on track to what we're actually talking about.

- *Theme 3.* The last theme that emerged from the campus administrator interview data

regarding their role in PLC team meetings was brainstorming or offering ideas. The campus administrators shared how they perceived that sometimes it was helpful for a PLC team to have someone join them that had a fresh perspective or was new to the conversation. CA1 stated he felt his role was, "…to gain an understanding, also see what they've tried and then for us to brainstorm together some ideas that they could use or try."

CA5 provided an example of how he approached this same idea with one of his PLC teams.

> We were bouncing off ideas of how to make it work. I didn't tell them do this, but just putting ideas out there and trying to mesh that with their ideas to make it something that they were on board with that was in line with what they were trying to do.

Campus Administrator Perceptions of Actions to Support PLC Teams

Once the campus administrator interview data had been analyzed for the administrators' perceptions of the purpose of PLC teams and what the administrators perceived their role on those teams to be, the data were analyzed to determine how administrators perceived their actions in support of PLC teams. The conceptual framework for this study was based on an organizational systems perspective as it relates to Hipp and Huffman's (2010) five PLC dimensions of shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. Campus administrator interview questions also assessed administrator perceptions of how they supported PLC teams, based upon the five PLC dimensions.

- *Dimension 1*. The PLC dimension, Shared and Supportive Leadership, describes the idea that campus administrators should share leadership responsibilities with other staff members and stakeholders. This includes sharing power and authority in a democratic and supportive manner (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Several questions within the campus administrator interview

protocol solicited evidence for how the six campus administrators shared leadership opportunities and decision making with others and how they built leadership capacity within these parties, so they had the knowledge and ability to adequately fulfill that responsibility. CA1 explained that sharing leadership responsibilities started with identifying staff members on the campus who are invested and want to take on that added responsibility.

> To build the leadership capacity, I think that for me, that kind of starts out whenever you're hiring and seeing some certain traits in people. There are things I look for. It's identifying people on your campus that are passionate about the direction your campus is going and to grow those leaders, and those that want to aspire to be in different roles like principals or instructional coaches and how you build their capacity through mentorship.
>
> We have people that are interested, obviously, in becoming counselors or instructional coaches or assistant principals. When you look at those, and I'll just talk specifically about assistant principals and instructional coaches, those are very academic based as far as our roles of being the instruction curriculum leaders. With both of those groups, it's about going to walkthroughs and going through collaborative plan [*sic*] and having an existing IC or AP walking alongside those leaders so that they can understand our perspectives since it's a little bit different than when you're in the classroom. I think doing that for sure, I think it's really important. I mentioned this earlier too, about finding teachers, even if they don't want to aspire to be in those roles, but even as leaders on your campus to identify those that have a passion for certain aspects.

CA2 spoke about the importance of providing staff members the opportunities to experience other roles, such as that of an administrator, so they begin to see the workings of a campus from a different perspective.

> So, right now I've got eight [staff members] that want to move up, that expressed that they would definitely want to move up. And they want to become administrators, so they went back to college to get their degrees in leadership. And then we do their admin internships together. So, I want to make sure that they have as much experience in the role as possible. Outside of just, "Hey, I got to get 160 hours standing at basketball duty or whatever it is, to me that's not important." So, we spent a lot of time really trying to put them in situations and exposing them as much as possible to the role. So, if I have a big discipline investigation, I might not be able to bring them in the middle of it, but I will bring them in and we'll talk through the process... What is the outcome? What would they do?

CA3 reiterated this same idea but added the importance of seeking potential leaders out and

providing them leadership experiences.

> I think the other thing is seeking out individuals that we see potential in. I think that's part of our job because sometimes it's hard to invest time in people. I know that there's a couple of people that have tried to be APs forever and ever at Heritage...But one of them [the teachers] they're like, well, people will try to mentor her in the past, but she came to me and she sought me out and said, "I don't know, I just feel this connection with you…I know I'm older and I know people wouldn't think of me as an AP." So I gave her the fourth, nine weeks duty schedule and was like, okay, here's what I need, go. But I have check-ins with her and I'm like, how far have you gotten? What have been your challenges? What have been your roadblocks? And so that's the first little thing that she did….I do think that by next year, she'll be ready to be in an AP pool…

CA4 described the process at their campus to create a culture where staff members have the opportunity to be actively involved and take part in determining the direction of the campus and ultimately moving other staff members in that direction.

> With our leadership team, that's where we start with everything as far as building their knowledge and their capacity and their understanding around why we are doing what we're doing. And then down to the IC level. When we meet with ICs, they're focusing more on that first goal in a lot of their work. And then I have committees that are working on the other ones…So it's really building capacity across the campus. Like, who cares about this thing, and who is going to care about it so much that they're pouring into it? So you're not pulling the cart along. You have people who are willingly pushing it….what I believe is, we can't only focus on one thing and make movement. You have to focus on a lot of things, but not everybody has to focus on all of those things. So in my building at one time, I want a group of teachers becoming experts in standards-based mindset. I want a group of teachers becoming experts in blended learning. I want a group of teachers becoming experts in social-emotional health for kids, social-emotional health from teachers. I want a group of people becoming experts in, how do we create the safest physical environment? And so that's how all of my committees were created, and then I have the teachers like, "Which one do you care about? Which one do you want to be a part of?" And so my idea was that we're building capacity in these people because eventually we're all going to have to do some part of that. But when we get to that point, I can't be an expert in everything, especially because I'm not a practitioner. So I need my practitioners to become experts in things, and you're going to be more likely to learn and grow in the things that I'm passionate about.

- *Dimension 2*. The second PLC dimension, Shared Values and Vision, assesses how the vision of the campus is supported by everyday decisions and actions of the campus staff

(Hipp & Huffman, 2010). CA1 described how PLC teams are integral in support of the mission and vision at their campus.

> With the vision of the campuses, it's instilling our warrior traits for the academic, social, and emotional growth of our students…I think that we have our warrior traits, bravery, character, loyalty, and wisdom. When you're talking about PLC, wisdom encompasses a lot, whether it is academics, academic success, or problem solving, or critical thinking. Those aspects are all part of who we are. I think that that's how that just all aligns is just that focus on academics and then having that SEL piece to support the learning…. We spent a lot of time focusing on relationship-building, not just with our teams, but also with our kids. And that's one of our biggest campus expectations is that our teachers really spend time, truly building relationships with our kids. And when we take our school safety surveys and things like that, the data shows that the kids see that the teachers really care about them. And it's just based on their actions, it's just based on them having those conversations and high fives and fist bumps and having conversations with kids and not having, not talking at a kid, but talking to and with a kid, those are different.

CA4 spoke about the importance of the vision within the hiring process at his campus and how it impacts other decisions that are made.

> It's [the vision] a good communication piece when you're going through hiring because you're like, "This is who we are, and if this doesn't align with your beliefs, don't say yes, because you will be unhappy because everything we do comes back to this belief system." The way I understand vision is, what are we going to be in the future? Let's imagine what we're going to be in the future. And, so for me, the vision drives everything. Every year, it also grounds, this is why we're doing what we're doing. We created a vision as a staff. We created our belief statements…. Our vision is to be leaders in learning and innovation. So, if we're going to be leaders in learning and innovation, we should at least be on par with what the leaders are already doing right now. So, then it's like, "Well, what are they doing?" They are doing standards-based grading. They are doing things where the students are taking ownership in their learning process. Blended learning. If that's what the leaders are doing, and we want to be leaders, we need to know what they're doing, and then we need to be striving towards those things.

- *Dimension 3.* The next PLC dimension, Collective Learning and Application, is the idea that teachers and staff learn together to better their craft to better serve student learning needs. CA1 described the job-embedded professional learning present on his campus.

> We meet once a month on their [teachers'] conference period for about 45 minutes or so. The most recent one was over standard-based grading.…The reason why I think that that's been so supportive is because we really, we ask the teachers what they want, like

> where their area of need is. Then, we design a professional development through that. At the end, we get feedback on that. Then, we come back together as that team and talk about next steps. I feel like that's really been, it's really a good, it's a good way for us to provide meaningful professional development to support them in their PLCs, as opposed to just coming up with something that we think they need.

CA6 is a campus administrator on the same campus as CA1. CA6 offered perspective on the job-embedded professional learning as well.

> It's that being reflective about what teachers need, what they know they need, and then what they don't know they need. And so, having conversations with their instructional coaches about where they are in their progress, and then sitting in and asking, what can I do to help? What can I do to support you in this situation? Is there anything that you guys need, or what professional development do you need in order to be better at things? And then when they actually ask for something, listening and giving some response to that, right? So that JET structure, I really like. That's something I'm going to carry with me forever, I think. Because having that built in once-a-month time, that you can have that discussion, that ongoing professional development, really enables us to be a lot more responsive to what teachers want and what they need.

- *Dimension 4.* The PLC dimension, Shared Personal Practice, assesses campus practices that allow staff members to learn from each other, such as teachers observing one another in the classroom or using student work and to provide feedback on instructional practices (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Data from the PLCA-R survey indicated that teachers scored this PLC dimension as the lowest scoring dimension for HSB and tied for the lowest scoring dimension at HSA. While CA1 described efforts at that campus to grow teachers' capacity as teacher leaders by having them present professional development to their peers, no other campus administrators provided examples during the interview as to how this was accomplished at their campus. What CA1 described is supported by data in the document analysis section later.

Campus administrators all discussed the importance of the instructional coach (IC) in supporting PLC teams. In Hilltop ISD, all high school campuses have ICs who support the core-content departments. Their role is to provide content and instructional support and coaching to teachers and teams. The ICs at the two participating campuses have teaching responsibilities but

are given periods within the day when they do not teach so they can support teachers in their department. CA4 described how the IC can take on a more supportive role whereas sometimes campus administrators can be viewed as evaluators and that can impact the PLC team's ability to be open to administrator support.

> When an AP is involved, and it's less about the IC facilitating the effective team conversation, but the IC might go back in and support. So, the IC and the AP would go in together. The AP would support them with like, "You're not even talking to each other," or, "You're not working." And then the ICs in there, so that then the IC can be the one who supportively follows up... When they go in, it gives them a common space to have a conversation. They're not talking in these broad, general, nebulous terms. They're talking concretely like, "Did you do this? Did you do this? Have you not done this? Is it because you don't know how?" And then they know how to support them.

CA4 also discussed how he works with the IC outside of PLC team meetings so the IC can then attend the meetings and support the teams. In essence, the administrator is supporting the team vicariously through the IC.

> I spend more targeted time with the ICs and the leadership team. So once I know where we're at, then I spend more time looking at data with them and having conversations with them about where teams are at, and then helping them be accountable to working and moving and growing the teams that are struggling based on the data, and then are struggling, also based on the student performance data, and then also the data that's collected by my associate and my APs who go and do the same kind of temperature checks with people. And they're able to determine how effectively are the teams working. Are they effective as a team, and then are they effective in their work? And then that helps inform the ICs of where they need to target their time.

Each high school campus in Hilltop ISD also has a DLC whose role is to support PLC teams with ways to increase technology integration in lessons and activities. The campus librarians have also taken a more active role in planning and supporting PLC teams. CA3 explained the successful ways their campus DLC has supported PLC teams.

> DLCs this year have been instrumental in supporting teams and individuals on teams that maybe are at different ability levels with regard to Canvas, MasteryConnect, and any sort of cool tips, tricks, and tools, tech tools that we can use within the LTIs and Canvas or whatever it may be for quick formatives. So, when we think of that DLC, I think that sometimes the way that it used to be, even when I was on a campus last, is like the DLC

> would create these experiences and teachers would come too. But now what I see that I'm really proud of is our DLC actually sees herself as a coach. She pushes in [to PLC meetings], just like our instructional coaches. She did a needs inventory survey of all the teams, and then she pushes in either with teams or individuals and that's her coaching. She has accountability with them, they come up with goals, they have whatever check-ins that they decide, and they figure out what is mastery of this going to look like. When do I know I've gotten there and what are next steps that I can do on my own so we can take the support out and then maybe start on a new project or something else like your deadline? You don't always need the DLC. You can do a lot of this on your own. You just need the initial skills, or you need an idea to help get it started. And so that's been really cool, to see that a DLC in an IC role and supporting literally from people that said that they are going to quit in August because they don't want to use Canvas.

- *Dimension 5*. The last PLC dimension, Supportive Conditions, evaluates supports such as time, facilities, and other resources that help PLC teams work effectively (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Throughout the interview questions, campus administrators identified resources and supports for PLC teams on their campus.

A support discussed by all six campus administrators was the master schedule and building common planning time into the school day. Even though all six campus administrators discussed that common planning during the day was a priority at their campus, there were times that scheduling conflicts prevented some teams from having that common time for the entire team. This was especially evident because of athletic coaches' schedules or constraints this year due to Covid 19. CA5 explained what this looks like on their campus.

> So we, with the cores, and even with world languages, we have common plans. Each subject has a common plan. I could probably think of like two outliers on campus…but when you throw in like StuCos and cheer and different things, sometimes it's just not possible to make it perfect, but probably all but two core subjects, they're on a common plan together. And if they're on two teams, then they are on two common plans. And so, it's been set up where it's like, one on A day, one on B day. So, I don't think there's any but maybe two that don't have a common plan. And those were strategically done where it was people who weren't brand new to the subject or weren't brand new to teaching. And they had an alternate plan of how they were going to meet with their team. Because we prioritize the common plan. We basically, before we did it, talk to them of like, "How are we going to make this work? How are you still going to get the time together with your team?" And then we had a plan for those, but they were very few exceptions.

Two of the six campus administrators discussed the usefulness of having a PLC planning document or a process document for PLC teams to use or refer to so they can ensure they are working through all aspects of an effective PLC process. CA4 described what is used on their campus.

> I created a graphic visual of what the PLC process... They've all been trained on it, but so they can sit down with them to say, "Okay, this is a PLC process. Where are you getting stuck? Because there is an issue. We're not getting all of the pieces done, we're not getting to intervention, or whatever. So where along this process are you stuck?" And then, they can work on those small little chunks because it's chunked out. Like, this is the thing you do, and then this is the thing you do, and this is the thing you do... And so, they can go through that. The graphic helps ground, like, "Are we doing all of the things? If you're not doing all the things, what are you not doing? And then, where are you getting stuck?"

Although almost all teams at both participating campuses were provided common planning time during the day, CA5 noted that teachers could always use more time. As a solution to meet that need, their campus problem solved and found ways to give teams more collaboration time.

> I think time is something that we try to get creative with giving them. I think that's the biggest thing that was missing, is all these things we want them to do. It's just not physically possible some weeks. That's why a lot of teams don't get to that level because they can barely get through covering the planning and figuring out how to grade and then they don't get to intervention or they don't get to targeted intervention or whatever. And so that's the biggest thing when we've been able to give people time, and that's another thing with our subs that we've gotten creative with is if we can get a team covered for a day or even a half a day, and they're doing a test or they can do something self-paced, we give them time to plan. And so, we'll get them covered with subs. We don't do it more than once a quarter for a team but giving them a half a day to a day, they tell us, is the best thing they could ever have. And when we do that, they'll submit what their plan is, what they want to cover; we'll go check on them, there's accountability to it, but they are able to just make progress on the things we want them to and to get to that point and it's not just survival, those things, I think with finding ways because we can't create time and we can't, at this point, take anything else off their plate that we want it to be possible for them to do the things that we want them to do.

While the pursuit to perfect execution and support of PLC processes will be forever ongoing, campus administrators described supports they felt were lacking and leadership actions

they would like to implement if they had all the time and resources at their disposal. Time was the most frequent response by campus administrators. This included more time for teachers and more time for administrators to participate in PLC team meetings. CA1 described how they could always use more, regardless of how much time teachers may already have to collaborate.

> I wish that I could give them [teachers] more time. It was kind of nice in the spring whenever we had the one day of planning per week, where teams could really use that time and be intentional. If they have that time, I would be very much more structured. I could see myself as an administrator saying, "Monday is PLC day and that's all that we do as administrators is going through PLCs and really supporting that process and probably honing in more on our questioning of the PLCs and where they're at and kind of challenging their thought process a little more."

CA5 reiterated the idea that teachers need more time, but it could be used for practices that could support the shared personal practice PLC dimension.

> I think of things like allowing teachers and giving them more time to be able to go observe each other and to be able to go observe other classrooms and maybe even other content but building that in is hard.

CA1 alluded to the many responsibilities and the busy schedule of a campus administrator and how they would prefer to spend more time with PLC teams and in classrooms.

> Getting into common plan in classrooms is always a goal, which I wish that I could just clear everything off [the schedule] and do that. It is great to be able to meet with teams and then go walk their classrooms and see how what they talked about is being put into practice. That takes time though to get into the PLC teams meetings and then time to do the walks and then time to give feedback.

CA6 added that, in the role an associate principal, they would take on more of the assistant principal's responsibilities so they could spend more time with PLC teams.

> I would like to have the freedom to help the other APs spend their time in there as well. So, alleviating some of their responsibilities…allowing them to be able to spend that time in there just to be responsive and to ask those questions and listen, and to really guide them away from the grind of day-to-day and be able to ask the broader questions of how are we being responsive to our students.

Hilltop ISD has offered many professional development opportunities to campus staff,

including the ability to attend Solution Tree, Inc.'s *PLC at Work*® symposiums, and learning regarding response to intervention and standards-based mindset from Solution Tree's other professional learning options. However, in a district with more than 4,500 current teachers and administrators, not every campus-based educator has been able to attend these trainings. CA6 described how their campus offered a basic PLC training to their staff when their campus opened several years ago. That same training has not been offered again in some time and teams would benefit from the training since teachers have come and gone and teams have changed.

> To provide more access to our initial PLC training to more teachers. We haven't offered that in a few years, but we've focused more on RTI. So, the initial PLC training, I know Richard DuFour isn't alive anymore, but they're still going to have some great speakers and they're still going to have that ability to set the tone and develop those teacher leaders that are going to carry the message on. I'd like to see us being able to participate in that with more teachers as well, because that's where you can catch people on fire and really set that idea of what this is and why it's important and what impact PLCs can have with the discussions that we're having.

Two of the campus administrators talked about additional coaching support for PLC teams and how they thought that would help those teachers be able to impact student learning even more. CA3 spoke about how it would be important to first determine the strengths and areas of refinement for the teams, even before providing more coaching to PLC teams.

> I would have the ICs figure out what they thought of those teams with regard to the stages and where they think the different teams are. And then I would go in and do the same analysis, just like we did. Now on the pulse sort of that placebo. So that would be my first. We've got to figure out where teams are to even know where to go.

CA3 then continued to describe training opportunities for ICs that would help them to better serve the PLC teams on their campus.

> I would allow my ICs to go to region trainig…training through Denton ISD that I've gone to literally for the last few years….I would literally take the instructional coaches there to start learning from other ICs and individuals who are in a coaching role of what instructional coaching could look like. To know what could that level look like. Because you actually go through a practicum. They actually take you to campuses at different campuses and you get to go into classrooms and start grading things with other people

> from other districts and talk about what does this look like. Oh, the teacher only moved from here to here. We would go into all these simulations and it was in real life classrooms. And then I hear from Highland Park, "Oh, this is how we do it" and Denton, "Oh wait, this is how we do it in Carlton-Farmers Branch"…Then we come back with, How can we apply that? That's the stuff that we're missing. And even within district we're missing that. From how ICs work at Lebanon Trail is way different than Heritage, how your meetings work, how your expectations work.

CA3 also added that not only did ICs need additional professional development but campus administrators do as well.

> Assistant principals (APs) need support. APs need to truly understand as administrators how to support the collaborative process and grow ICs, but also teams and hold teams accountable…how are administrators going to support the work? And it's not always training. Sometimes it's a simulation. Think about what we're trying to ask for teachers to do for our kids. Real life performance tasks or coming to this low functioning team at Heritage, and tell me what you would do in this situation. Hear what other administrators would do. We went to this crazy high-functioning team, they'll be like, Oh, which teams do you have there even on the spectrum? None? Okay. Well, how do we get there? Create a plan with your team, your other administrators, talk about how to hold each other accountable. Talk about what check-ins can I have with you to help you become a better administrator or me to learn from you.

In addition to more coaching training for ICs, CA4 explained that if an IC or another person in a coach or facilitator-type role could be in each PLC team meeting, they could help the team ensure they go through the entire PLC process with fidelity.

> I would prefer that there was somebody who was supporting their work, and that person could document where they're at. Then that person can provide feedback. Like, "Hey, y'all haven't talked about when you're going to intervene with kids. You haven't talked about how you're going to measure this standard before you move on to this next thing."…having an individual coach with each team who could provide that documentation and who could provide that feedback to them to ensure that they are on the right track and that they have all the support and resources they need… time and devoting attention to things, and honoring teachers in their time. And also, we've been really creative with subs giving teachers pull-out time. So even if I couldn't have a coach who was in with teams every single time, if I could have a coach and the time to do pull outs frequently with teams, that would be awesome.

Campus Administrator Perceptions of Needed Supports for PLC Teams

Campus administrators offered a few other supports they wish they could put in place for

PLC teams on their campuses. CA4 explained the struggle with determining if their campus should have a campus-wide PLC planning document to help support the work of teams.

> Sometimes having an agenda or requiring some documentation that you're doing, all the things helps ground the work, but I struggle because, when there is something that has to serve as a documentation piece, sometimes it just becomes something that they quickly fill in to turn in. You know what I mean? It's like when you have to post your lesson plans, and you're going to do a really good lesson, but the thing that you turn in a week or two weeks ahead of time is just going to be thrown together. And it's a compliance piece. Like, "I'm being compliant, I'm turning something in." And I struggle with that with PLCs because the same is true for agendas or documentation, that it can become something that is like, "Here you go. I'm compliant. Leave me alone." But it's also something that could potentially really serve to help people. So in the absence of requiring it, then they're not doing it. And by not doing it, they may be missing a really good supportive tool.

The last support that CA2 felt would be very beneficial for teams was common planning time during the school day. While most teams did have this built-in support, there were a few teams at both campuses for whom this was not possible. C2 stated:

> I would completely rearrange…our calendar to make sure that our teachers have a common time, that they're not having to meet before or after school. I would look at rearranging the schedule, if that was possible, to make sure that they have a built-in common time. And I just say that simply because of the campuses that I've been on, where we've had common planning and everyone's had a common planning period versus, kind of intermixed, it works so much better when everyone has a true 100% common planning period. When that's the focus and the whole team is there.

The data collected through the campus administrator and teacher interviews exhibit the variance in perception between the two stakeholder groups in how campus administrators currently support campus PLC teams, the perceived effectiveness of the supports in place, and the perceived need for different or additional supports.

Document Analysis Results

Document analysis served as a valuable research process in this study for reaching triangulation when combined with survey and interview data. Campus administrators and teachers were asked to share artifacts they felt helped to support the PLC processes at their

campuses. Six documents shown in Table 6 were individually analyzed to determine which PLC dimension(s) the content of each document supported. Five of the six documents were examples of professional development sessions held at the campuses.

Table 6

Campus Document Analysis

Artifact	Shared and Supportive Leadership	Shared Values and Vision	Collective Learning and Application	Shared Personal Practice	Supportive Conditions
Document 1 (HSA)	X	X	X		
Document 2 (HSB)			X		X
Document 3 (HSA)	X		X		X
Document 4 (HSB)	X		X		X
Document 5 (HSA)	X	X	X	X	X
Document 6 (HSB)	X	X	X		X

Document 1 was a presentation for an introduction to campus PLC beliefs and processes at High School A (HSA). The learning session was developed and presented by ICs on that campus. Document 2 was a visual organizer a campus administrator at High School B (HSB) created to help the PLC teams at that campus work through the PLC process. The campus principal presented it to teachers during a staff learning session and referred to it when meeting with PLC teams. The document was meant to be a resource teachers and teams could refer to as needed. Document 3 was from a professional learning session presented at HSA by their DLC, librarian, and ICs. Resources were provided during the learning session for teachers to utilize when working with their PLC teams. Document 4 was also a presentation at HSB where ICs presented to teachers during a staff learning day. Document 5 was from a staff job-embedded learning session at HSA that was created and presented by the ICs. Within this professional learning session, teachers were provided opportunities to discuss their grading philosophy and

practices and to reflect independently and with each other. Lastly, Document 6 was a presentation at HSB by the special education IC and English as a second language (ESL) teacher. They collaborated to create and present the presentation.

Five of the six documents analyzed are examples of presentations created and presented by campus staff members other than campus administrators. This evidence supports the Shared and Supportive Leadership and the Collective Learning and Application PLC dimensions as the opportunity and power were given to other staff members on the campus to lead their peers in professional learning. The discussion and reflection activities within the Document 5 presentation aligned with the Shared Professional Practice PLC dimension. Any of the artifacts analyzed that included embedded links to resources or tools for staff members to refer to in the future were aligned with the Supportive Conditions PLC dimension.

Summary of Data Analysis

The data collected for this study included 58 teacher responses to an online survey, 6 campus administrator interviews, and 12 teacher individual semi-structured interviews. The participants were from two participating high school campuses within a large, suburban north Texas school district. The survey data and teacher interview responses provided answers to Research Question 1 regarding teachers' perceptions of campus administrator actions to support PLC teams. The campus administrator interview responses provided data to answer Research Question 2. Analysis of campus documents coalesced with other data for triangulation. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, conclusions based on data presented in the study, implications for practices, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes a summary of this study, including an overview of the problem, purpose, research questions, and the methodology. A synopsis of the findings includes my interpretation of how the findings answer each of the research questions, and how this research relates to prior published literature. Lastly, implications for action and recommendations for further research are also included in the chapter.

Overview of the Problem

The concept of professional learning communities (PLCs) has evolved over the past couple of decades to positively impact student learning experiences through increased teacher collaboration and teacher learning. For PLCs to be implemented with fidelity and to have the greatest impact possible, they must be implemented on campuses then sustained through the intentional actions and supports of campus administrators. Current research shows that campus and district leaders can support the implementation and sustainment of PLCs through such actions as ensuring PLC teams have time within the school day to collaborate and a space in which to do so, and have other needed resources, such as a supportive campus culture, continual professional learning opportunities, and the ability to share their practices with others and to gain feedback on their own practices (Blankstein et al., 2008; DuFour et al., 2016; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kanold, 2011). However, there is scarcity in the research regarding teachers' perspectives of campus administrator actions they feel are helpful and supportive of their PLC teams. The gap between the actions campus administrators theoretically should take to support PLC teams and what teachers felt was supportive in practice was the focus of this study.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore campus administrator and teacher perceptions of administrator actions that support professional learning communities for teachers in high school core-content subjects. Teachers nor campus administrators have time to waste, so administrators need to ensure their efforts are spent in the most effective and efficient manner while still supporting PLCs. However, if actions are not helpful and supportive, they are fruitless, and time is squandered. In this study, I analyzed what campus administrators reported to be the supports they implemented to support content-specific PLC teams. Additionally, I examined teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of administrator actions in support of PLC teams. Two research questions guided this study:

1. What campus administrators' actions support PLC teams as perceived by teachers?
2. How do campus administrators perceive their support of PLC teams?

Review of Methodology

An explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was utilized to achieve the goal of understanding campus leaders' and teachers' perceptions of administrator behaviors that may or may not support campus-level core-content PLC teams. This research design was appropriate for this study as the qualitative data would help to further explain and provide context to the initial quantitative data collected (Creswell, 2012). The quantitative portion was an electronic survey administered via the PLC Associates website to core-content teachers at the two participating high school campuses. The qualitative part of the study included semi-structured interviews conducted virtually, using the Zoom platform, with core-content teachers and campus administrators at the same two participating campuses. Participant-provided campus artifacts were also analyzed as evidence of supportive practices for PLC teams. The results of

this inductive study include recommended actions based on the data. The next section provides a discussion of the findings of that data analysis.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion section is presented in two parts. The first section corresponds with Research Question 1 with emergent themes explained and compared with survey data. The second section is a discussion of each of the emergent themes from campus administrator interviews for Research Question 2.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 had a purpose of gaining an understanding of teachers' perceptions of campus administrators' support of PLC teams. This portion of the study relied upon two sources of data collection: an electronic survey and one-on-one semi-structured interviews with teachers. The electronic survey, the PLCA-R developed by Olivier (2003), gauged perceptions of campus practices intended to support PLCs. The 52-item survey included additional customized questions to gather data regarding teaching and PLC experience. Teachers at the two participating high school campuses also were recruited to participate in one-on-one interviews conducted virtually via Zoom. Interviews took between 20 and 40 minutes. The interview transcripts were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. The responses were coded utilizing open-coding methods; those codes were then categorized and collapsed into emergent themes.

Survey data collected using the PLCA-R electronic survey indicate the teachers at the two participating campuses have an overall positive perception of the campus practices to support PLC teams. The 58 teachers who responded to the survey scored each item using a four-point Likert scale, from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The findings from the survey also

include some areas in which the practices could be strengthened to better support PLC teams. Table 7 indicates the average score for each of the PLC dimensions, from highest to lowest means. The PLC dimension Supportive Conditions – Relationships had the highest mean score of 3.38.

Table 7

Mean Score for Each PLC Dimension

PLC Dimension	Mean Score
Supportive Conditions - Relationships	3.38
Collective Learning and Application	3.35
Shared Values and Vision	3.28
Supportive Conditions - Structures	3.26
Shared and Supportive Leadership	3.22
Shared Personal Practice	3.05

According to the teacher survey participants, campus practices to be considered strengths included administrators being proactive in providing teachers support when needed, campus practices that are aligned with campus values and vision, supports that are present to allow staff to work collaboratively to address students' needs, campus staff are able to share ideas to improve student learning, staff and student relationships that are based on trust and respect, and school facilities that are welcoming and clean. These findings are supported by existing literature. It is the responsibility of the campus administrator to (a) ensure that all staff and stakeholders have a voice in decision-making for the campus, (b) cultivate and communicate the campus vision and values that are supported through learning opportunities, (c) ensure that a trusting and collaborative campus culture is present, and (d) provide staff members the resources needed to effectively work as a PLC team (DuFour et al., 2016; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Kanold, 2011; Stoll et al., 2006).

As evidenced by comparatively lower mean scores on some survey items, campuses within Hilltop ISD have opportunities for refinement in their campus practices in support of PLCs. These areas of growth are: (a) staff members being consistently involved in the decision-making process for school issues, (b) staff and stakeholders being involved in the establishment of high expectations regarding student learning, (c) all stakeholders learning together to solve problems, (d) staff members sharing student work as evidence to drive school improvement, (e) all staff members and stakeholders collaborating to implement change efforts as part of the school culture, and (f) staff members having easy access to data.

Teacher survey data also were disaggregated by various subgroups. This allowed an assessment to determine the consistency of perceptions based on overall years of teaching, years of teaching within the participating school district, years of teaching by content area, and years of teaching by campus. When the data were sorted by overall years of teaching, the difference between the subgroups of 1-4 years and 5-10 years was within 0.01 for the mean scores. The means scores for all PLC dimensions were lower as the total years of teaching increased. When categorized by years of teaching within Hilltop ISD, teachers with 1-4 years within the district had the highest mean score and teachers with 11-20 years had the lowest mean scores. There were no teachers with 21> years of teaching in Hilltop ISD who completed the survey. Teachers with 11-20 years of teaching experience in Hilltop ISD began their career prior to the district efforts to implement PLCs, so this was a paradigm shift for them. Data categorized by teacher content area showed social studies teachers having the highest mean score for all the PLC dimensions, followed respectively by the science, English, and mathematics teachers. Lastly, the data show high levels of congruence among the teachers from both campuses. These

comparisons reveal a consistency among the perceptions of teachers from the participating campuses.

The findings of the qualitative portion of the study are not generalizable since the size of the study was limited to a small number of interviews within a smaller sample of the population. However, depending upon where in the PLC implementation process a district or campus may be, campus administrators may find the actions described to be helpful to the PLC teams they support.

Teacher interview data were analyzed and compared with survey data to determine teachers' perceptions of campus administrator roles within a PLC team. The first theme identified in teacher interview data was that the campus administrator served as a neutral member of the PLC team. Teachers stated that it was helpful when an administrator could participate in a team meeting and be objective because administrators were able to see the potential impact of PLC team decisions on all students whereas teachers may focus more on only the students in their classroom. This relates back to the idea that it is important for all staff members on a campus to have a systems perspective because PLC teams make decisions that impact a great number of students and their learning opportunities (Fullan, 2005).

The second emerged theme was that teachers felt it was an administrator's role to remind the team of expectations and support members in becoming a higher functioning team. This was especially true of teachers who provided stories of being part of lower functioning or dysfunctional PLC teams. While this may be inferred to be a more authoritarian function of an administrator, this leadership role may be necessary to help a team become more effective in the long run. Teachers felt it was an administrator's duty to observe the team, listen, and then offer ideas. Teachers did not want administrators who came into a meeting and dictated to the team

what they needed to be doing. Teachers commented that they appreciated when administrators asked questions to remind the team of bigger goals or to help them remember the direction toward which they should be heading. Hord and Sommers (2008) indicated that leaders need to support teams by asking questions and probing teams in a positive manner to further their thinking. Administrators who attend PLC team meetings in a judgmental or dictatorial manner hamper the learning and progress of a team. All the themes regarding teachers' perceptions of campus administrators' roles within PLC teams require an administrator to be present in PLC team meetings. DuFour et al. (2016) indicated that modeling what collaboration, conflict resolution, and learning behaviors look like are campus leader actions needed to support PLC teams.

Teachers had several responses when they were asked to identify resources at their campus that were supportive of PLCs. The first examples were aligned with the Collective Learning and Application PLC dimension. This dimension had a mean score of 3.35 on the PLCA-R survey. Professional learning was a support valued by teachers. Teachers discussed how helpful PLC training and learning opportunities are as new teachers are introduced to the campus each year. Teachers remarked that PLC training at the beginning of the year helped to alleviate problems within teams as the year progressed, as new teachers gained an understanding of the expectations regarding PLCs at the campus and did not solely rely upon any past PLC experiences they might have had. Teachers also remarked that on-going professional learning was beneficial throughout the year, regarding the four PLC questions and PLC processes. If learning only occurs at the beginning of the year, teams may relapse into old habits or lose steam to continue growing without the reminders. Teams also need support through continual professional learning to effectively implement new programs or initiatives. According to Hord

and Sommers (2008), professionals must have learning opportunities to reflect upon their practices, refine those practices, and define additional professional learning that is needed to improve student learning.

Another frequently cited support was the availability and support of the campus instructional coach (IC), digital learning coach (DLC), and the librarian. This campus practice aligns with the Shared Personal Practice PLC dimension and was aligned with the survey item "Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring" that had a mean score of 3.12, whereas the related dimension had a mean score of 3.05. This was a relative strength for the campuses. Teachers communicated their understanding that campus administrators had many responsibilities, recognizing that it was not always possible for the administrator to attend PLC team meetings. In the absence of the administrator, teachers reported that it was helpful to have the support of the IC to help move the team forward. The DLC and librarian were an asset to help teams integrate technology or other instructional activities into their plans. The teachers frequently discussed the support of the IC, DLC, and librarian as a supportive campus practice, and the mean score for that particular survey item showed this practice to be above the mean as well. As explained by Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016), one reason teachers may find the help of these other staff members, especially the IC, as being supportive is that the IC is often able to spend more time with teachers and may even still be a classroom teacher, so they are perceived to have greater relevant experience similar to that of a teacher.

Teachers reported that most supports were aligned with the Supportive Conditions PLC dimension. Common planning time during the school day was the most frequently cited support. This is congruent with data from the PLCA-R survey where the mean score for the survey item "Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work" was 3.42 on the four-point Likert scale.

DuFour et al. (2016) posited that if PLCs are going to be communicated as a priority, they need to be supported as a priority in the master schedule by administrators providing teams with common collaborative time to work during the school day. Teachers reiterated this message, commenting that if PLCs were determined as a mechanism for teachers to help move toward the campus vision and achievement of campus goals, staff needed the time to be able to do so. Teachers from both campuses described how this was a support that is built into their school day, for the most part. However, some of the teachers were either on a team or knew of a team that did not have common planning time built into the school day, so those teams had to meet before or after school. Those teachers did not feel that time was used as effectively as having dedicated time to collaborate during the day would be.

When teachers discussed several items when asked to identify supportive actions they felt were lacking, the first supportive action teachers desired to see more of was simply campus administrators having increased visibility in the hallways and in PLC meetings. Teachers discussed the importance of impromptu informal conversations with administrators in the hallways or just outside of formal evaluation scenarios. They described how these conversations were important to building a relationship with administrators so that when they needed help, they felt more comfortable going to an administrator for that assistance. Mitchell and Sackney (2006) considered this level of visibility and the presence of an open-door policy to be the work of a campus leader as the leader continually understands the teaching and learning happening within the school building. Additionally, teachers stated that if they did not have a relationship with administrators, when an administrator came to their hallway or in their classroom, they were uneasy because they felt like they may be in trouble. Leithwood and Azah (2015) connected the importance of communication to effective collaboration and the presence of trusting

relationships. During PLC meetings, administrator visibility was not necessarily wanted because teachers felt they needed more support within the PLC meetings, but they wanted more check-ins and an administrator stopping by the meeting to see if the team needed anything. Teachers shared that if PLCs were a priority on the campus, administrators should be visible during PLC meetings at some point to gain an understanding of the actual progress of the campus. Mitchell and Sackney (2006) discussed how the principal is a role model for all parties within a school community, including how to treat others, how to communicate, and for what good teaching and learning looks like on a campus. Teachers also desired that campus administrators set clear expectations for the PLC processes at their campus. To aid PLC teams in ensuring they were following those expectations, teachers stated that a PLC process chart, script, or visual would be helpful. Lastly, teachers indicated that because there is a plethora of resources for them to use, it would be beneficial if there was a central digital location where those resources could be housed so it was easier to find the resources as needed.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 sought to gain campus administrators' perceptions of how they support PLC teams. This part of the study consisted of one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted virtually with the principal and two other campus administrators from each of the two participating high school campuses, using a 15-item protocol. Interviews lasted between 30 to 54 minutes, and with participant permission were audio recorded and then transcribed. The interview transcripts were reviewed, and the same coding process as teacher interviews was utilized. Interview items six and seven elicited the most data to answer Research Question 2. Those items asked campus administrators to describe what they viewed to be their role when participating in a PLC team meeting and how their actions in that meeting supported the team.

Three themes emerged from those data: listening and questioning, having difficult conversations, and brainstorming or offering ideas.

Theme 1: Listening and Questioning

The first theme that emerged from the campus administrator interview data was their listening and questioning for supporting PLC teams. Four of the six campus administrators discussed how they felt it was important for them to attend PLC meetings and just listen to the dialogue of the team. Listening allowed them to gain insight into how the team functioned, where the team was in their processes, and the best supports the team needed. The most common aspect discussed by administrators was listening, which gave them the information needed to ask questions of the team for guiding the team in the right direction or to help the team focus on the elements that really needed the most attention. These ideas connect with the PLC dimension, Shared and Supportive Leadership. Campus administrators stressed the idea that they were not present in team meetings to give teams all the answers or to control the meeting; their presence and questions were intended to be supportive and to help the team think about things that maybe they had not considered. Kanold (2011) pointed out that the real finesse in leadership is when leaders can influence others in real and authentic ways without having to resort to authoritarian power. Hord and Sommers (2008) pointed out that it is essential for all members of a PLC team, including campus leaders, to have open dialogue regarding instructional problems and work collaboratively to solve these problems. While not taking control of a PLC meeting is just one example of a campus administrator sharing leadership with a smaller group of staff members, if the administrator acts in a supportive manner by listening and asking questions, then the PLC team members' own leadership capacities are strengthened, and they will be able to carry on the work with greater efficacy when the administrator is not present (Kanold, 2011).

Other actions to support this PLC dimension were shared by campus administrators. These included identifying potential leaders among the staff. Administrators discussed that wanting to become a campus administrator was not the only leadership path on the campus. Administrators also sought staff members who wanted to take on instructional leadership roles, as well as those who desired to continue in their role as a teacher but to gain additional leadership responsibilities. Campus administrators suggested that one benefit of sharing leadership opportunities with others is that this action broadens staff members' perspectives, and they begin to view various facets of the campus from different lenses and see how all the aspects are related. This idea was echoed by Wilhelm (2010), who suggested that when shared leadership is commonplace for a campus, the whole campus staff is more invested in solving campus problems and feels shared ownership in the solutions.

Theme 2: Having Difficult Conversations

The second theme which became evident was administrator support through having difficult conversations with PLC teams or individual teachers. The Shared Vision and Values and the Supportive Conditions – Relationships and are two PLC dimensions that connect with this campus administrator action. Kanold (2011) described the role of campus leadership to help build "relational capacity" (p. 106) in teams where that support is needed. It is also imperative for campus administrators to support teams in times of conflict so they can refocus and work toward the campus shared vision (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Two of the campus administrators talked about the importance of helping to resolve problems within a team or having a constructive conversation with one or more team members. CA2 and CA3 described how they helped a team establish purpose and mediate an issue through a conflict resolution process so they could focus on student learning and not issues with adult collaboration. Voelkel and

Crispeels (2017) concluded that less well-functioning teams "may not share the same mental model of the PLC work" (p. 444). Based on the findings of this current study, the campus administrator may be an important member of the PLC team to help shape the other team members' mental models so they can work as a more effective team. Campus administrators also described how it was important to develop the leadership capacity within other staff members because administrators could not do all the heavy lifting on their own to move the campus toward the fulfillment of the campus vision.

Theme 3: Brainstorming or Offering Ideas

The last theme identified was campus administrators brainstorming with PLC teams or offering their ideas to the team. Campus administrators offered how they felt they supported teams when the team members felt stuck and needed a fresh perspective. Administrators were able to provide ideas or suggestions to help spur a team's thinking so they could get back on track or the suggestion would lead team members to a solution to their problem. Such actions by campus administrators are examples of actions included in the Collective Learning and Application PLC dimension. Often, professional learning is thought to be a formal process that takes place during a professional learning session where knowledge is imparted to the audience by a holder-of-knowledge. HSA has implemented job-embedded professional development where staff come together to learn. However, learning also takes place as PLC teams discuss and problem solve together, pulling from their prior experiences or researching to find answers. Hipp and Huffman (2003) stressed that actions taken while working together as a PLC team foster learning opportunity for all members of the team.

Campus administrators acknowledged that PLC practices on their campuses were not perfect. Administrators identified supports they felt were lacking or that they would like to

provide to further support PLC teams. These included: (a) more time for administrators to participate in PLC meetings, (b) giving teachers more time to learn from each other, and (c) more time for teams to collaborate.

Schools are complex organizations which are led, sustained, and influenced by many different entities. The research findings highlight the varying perceptions of teachers and campus administrators regarding the role of campus administrators in PLC teams and the actions of campus administrators to support PLC teams. Quality effective campus practices that are aligned with each of Hipp and Huffman's (2010) five PLC dimensions would strengthen the organization as a whole and increase the connectedness of all aspects of a campus as a system. Voelkel (2019) found that when the appropriate campus structures are implemented, and teachers are enabled to act, then their confidence increases, and the PLC team can become a more well-functioning team. The mental models, or preconceived thoughts, ideas, and biases, of administrators and teachers regarding effective supports of PLCs only highlight the complexity of a school and the interrelatedness of its components (Senge, 2006). Each administrator's or teacher's responses to survey items or interview questions was based upon their mental model regarding the perception of intent of supports for their PLC teams. There was an expressed congruence by both campus administrators and teachers in this study that if a campus is to function as a learning organization, as defined by Senge (2006), teachers need the ability to learn, collaborate, and problem-solve so they can best meet students' needs. Before a school campus can truly become a learning organization, all staff members and stakeholders need to shift from an individualistic mentality to having a systems-thinking perspective so they can evaluate how their individual actions and the actions of their PLC teams impact and affect the larger campus system (Rhodes, 2003).

Surprises

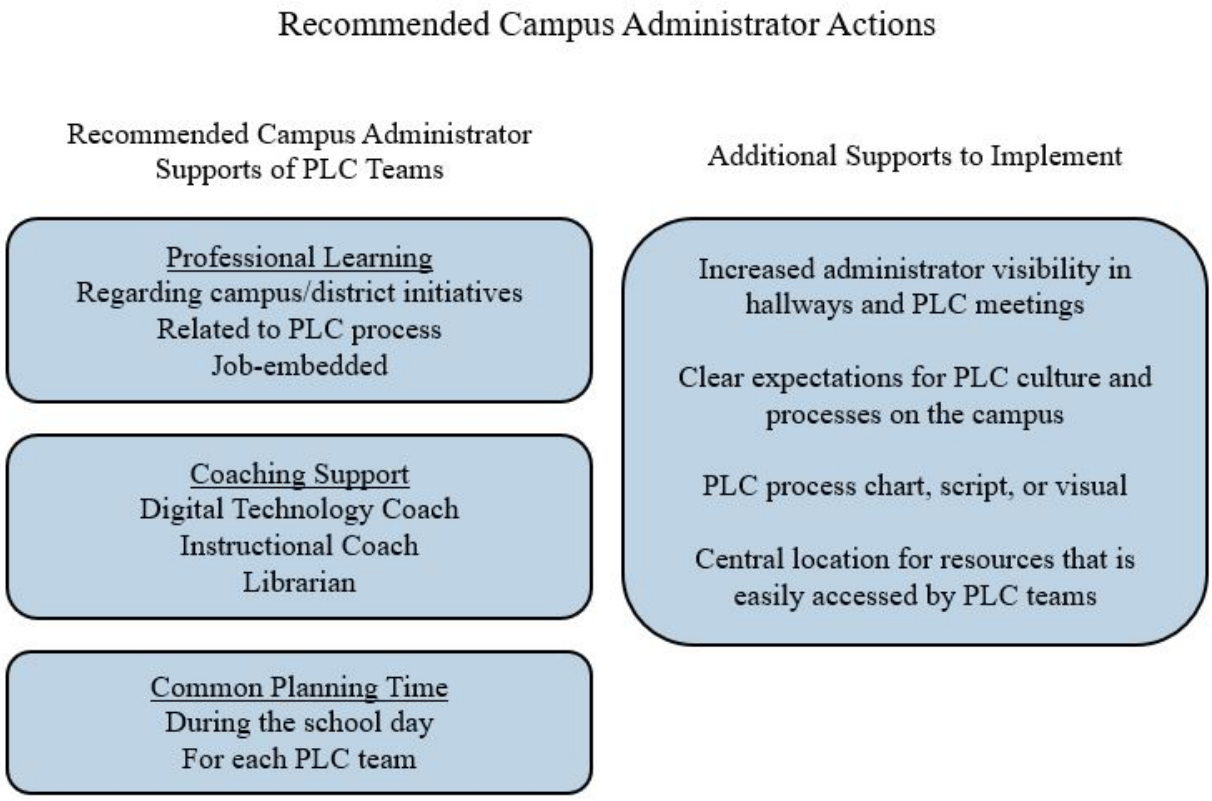
A couple of unanticipated problems occurred through the data collection process of this research study. The data collection for the study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in the early months of 2021. Educators in Hilltop ISD, like most other school districts around the country, were tired and weary from a school year of uncertainty, worry, and problems. Many teachers were teaching students in both face-to-face and virtual formats, they had dealt with student absences due to quarantines, and many dealt with sickness or quarantines within their own family unit. Each participating campus principal sent an email regarding this study to the core-content teachers on their respective campus. However, even with the principal's email and repeated reminders regarding the PLCA-R survey, the participation rate for the survey was low at 38%. Additionally, although teacher interviews only took as little as 20 minutes for some participants, it was still difficult to recruit teachers to participate in an interview, likely for the same reasons as the survey. Twenty-five teachers were recruited by email to participate in the survey. One follow-up email was sent to the teachers and six teachers from each campus eventually responded and agreed. The low participation rate for the survey and the slow response regarding interview participation could have been a result of teachers just not needing one more thing to do.

Implications for Action

The purpose of this research study was to understand both teachers' and campus administrators' perceptions regarding campus administrator actions in support of campus core-content PLC teams. Figure 11 summarizes the most frequently cited supportive actions of campus administrators, as perceived by teacher interview participants. The figure also includes what additional supports teacher participants suggested need to be provided.

Figure 11

Recommended Campus Administrator Actions



The opportunity exists for teachers and campus administrators to view the effectiveness of those supports very differently, so one purpose of conducting the study was to identify campus administrator actions that support PLC teams.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research study was limited in scope as only two high schools within one north Texas suburban school district were studied. The data collected were informative and insightful. This current study could be replicated within Hilltop ISD repeatedly over time to measure how the implementation and sustainment of actions that support PLCs change over time. This study could also be conducted at the middle school or elementary school level. While there may be

supportive actions on the part of campus administrators that are applicable at all grade levels, there also may be actions that are particularly relevant for some grade levels more than others. Additionally, the study could be expanded to a larger sample within Hilltop ISD since this study included only two high schools within the school district.

There was also intriguing data collected through the survey that could warrant further study. A more in-depth analysis of the data disaggregated by total years of teaching, years of teaching within Hilltop ISD, and by teacher content area along with context provided by additional qualitative data could add to the current research.

Conclusion

There is a vast amount of research indicating what supports and resources need to be implemented to support PLC teams on campuses. There is also ample research indicating what the role of campus administrators should be in supporting PLC teams. However, there has been little research to gain insight from the perspective of the teachers on those PLC teams regarding their perception of those resources, supports, and campus administrator actions and how supportive they really are. The purpose of this study was to discover campus administrator actions that teachers perceive to be supportive of their PLC teams. These insights could then provide campus administrators input regarding possible effective uses of their time. This was accomplished by assessing PLC supports at two high school campuses in a suburban north Texas school district. The teachers' perceptions of campus practices that are intended to support PLC teams were assessed through an electronic survey. The teachers' perceptions regarding campus administrator actions in support of PLC teams were garnered through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with teachers from each of the participating campuses. Three administrators at each of the participating campuses also were interviewed to assess their

perception of their efforts in support of PLC teams. Campus artifacts that supported the PLC dimensions also were analyzed. Through the data collected, it was clear what supports both teachers and campus administrators felt were supportive of PLC teams and what supports may be missing and need to be implemented. If it is educators' goal to positively impact student learning, then they must do so through collective efforts, starting with their PLC teams. Campus administrators also must align campus resources to support the vision of the campus and the work of PLC teams so that progress can be made toward student learning goals. When all stakeholders within the organization align efforts with the campus vision, all educators at the campus can work as a system to achieve their organizational goals. Thus, the findings from this mixed methods study should add useful information that is missing in current literature.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

DIVISION OF
RESEARCH & INNOVATION
Research Integrity
& Compliance

January 11, 2021

PI: Robert Voelkel Jr.
Study Title: CAMPUS LEADER AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPUS ADMINISTRATOR ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF CORE-CONTENT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES
IRB # IRB-20-610

Dear Dr. Robert Voelkel Jr.:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "CAMPUS LEADER AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPUS ADMINISTRATOR ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF CORE-CONTENT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES." The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study.

Your informed consent document can be found in the Study Details section under the Attachments tab in Cayuse IRB. Please store them in a secure location and **use the approved copy** for your study subjects.

Any and all changes to an approved research study must be submitted for review and approval prior to implementing the change(s) into the research study.

COVID-19 is having an impact on normal operations and procedures at UNT. Please review the following guidance to ensure you may proceed with in-person human subjects research. You must comply with all information located on this page during the conduct of your study to ensure safety of the participants and the research team.

Please contact the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 940-565-4643, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Note: Please do not reply to this email. Please direct all questions to untirb@unt.edu

Sincerely,

Gabe Ignatow, Ph.D.
Professor
Chair, Institutional Review Board

GI:im

APPENDIX B

PLC INNOVATION CONFIGURATION MAP (PLC-ICM)

(DIMENSION: SHARED AND SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP EXAMPLE)

	Not Initiating	Initiating	Implementing	Sustaining
Information Sharing and Decision Making	Administrators hold information and make decisions in isolation.	Administrators determine what information to share and with whom; selected staff are involved in decision making.	Administrators share most information with all staff and many decisions include most of the staff.	Information is available to all staff; administrators consistently involve staff in broad-based decision making.
Authority and Responsibility	Staff authority and responsibility are limited to daily issues of classroom teaching and learning.	Administrators offer increased authority and responsibility and nurture selected staff around teaching and learning issues at classroom and school levels.	Administrators involve and nurture all staff around teaching and learning issues at classroom and school levels.	Administrators and staff share authority and responsibility around issues of teaching and learning at all levels.
Commitment and Accountability	Staff do not hold themselves accountable for student learning.	Staff perceive themselves as accountable for student learning.	Staff hold themselves accountable for student learning.	Staff are committed to and accountable for student learning.

Source: Hipp & Huffman (2010).

APPENDIX C

PLC DEVELOPMENT RUBRIC (PLCDR)

Dimensions	Not Initiated	Initiation (Starting)	Implementation (Doing)	Institutionalization (Embedding)
Shared and Supportive Leadership Administrators share power, authority, and decision-making, while promoting and nurturing leadership.	Leadership is held by school administrators; staff are not empowered around issues of teaching and learning.	Pockets of leadership exist beyond school administrators; staff are nurtured and encouraged to take leadership roles.	Leadership is prevalent across the school; staff share power, authority, and responsibility around issues of teaching and learning.	Leadership and decision making are broad-based; empowerment exists around issues of teaching and learning; staff are committed and accountable.
Shared Values and Vision The staff share visions that have an undeviating focus on student learning, and support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	A school vision, values and plan do not exist, or do not involve stakeholders; there is a lack of focus on student learning.	Values and norms are espoused; a collaborative process exists for developing shared values and vision; some focus exists on student learning, but efforts are not aligned.	Shared vision and a set of values exist that reflect high expectations for student learning; efforts are aligned.	A shared vision and set of values is "lived" across the entire school community, and guide decisions policies, and programs related to teaching and learning.
Collective Learning and Application The staff share information and work collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning opportunities.	Collective learning does not exist; staff does not show evidence of learning from one another to meet diverse student needs.	Staff meet to share information and discuss issues of teaching and learning; staff begin to dialogue and act on their learning to meet diverse student needs.	Staff meet regularly to collaborate and problem solve around teaching and learning; staff show evidence of learning from one another to meet diverse student needs.	Staff share information and work together to seek new knowledge, skills and strategies; staff apply new learning to their work, and search for solutions to address diverse student needs.
Shared Personal Practice Peers meet and observe one another to provide feedback on instructional practices, to assist in student learning, and to increase human capacity.	Staff work in isolation, do not observe one another, offer feedback, or share practices with one another.	Some staff work collaboratively to observe and encourage one another, offer feedback, or share practices with one another.	Staff work collaboratively, observe one another, offer feedback and formally and informally share outcomes of new practices to improve student learning.	Formal and informal mentoring and coaching programs exist; staff observe one another and provide feedback, staff regularly review student work together and share instructional practices.
Supportive Conditions (Structures)	Systems and resources are not	The need for adequate systems and resources	Systems and resources are appropriate, in most cases,	Innovative efforts result in systems and resources that

Dimensions	Not Initiated	Initiation (Starting)	Implementation (Doing)	Institutionalization (Embedding)
Systems (e.g., communication, technology), and resources (e.g., personnel, facilities, time, fiscal, materials) enable staff to meet and examine practices and student outcomes.	sufficient to promote staff and student learning.	is considered to address staff and student learning.	to increase staff and student learning.	impact continual staff and student learning.
Supportive Conditions (Relationships) A culture of respect, trust, norms of critical inquiry and improvement, and positive, caring relationships pervade the entire school community.	Efforts do not exist that promote change in the culture of the school, such as: caring, trust, respect, a sense of safety, and recognition and celebration of efforts and achievement.	Some efforts exist that promote change in the culture of the school, such as: caring, trust, respect, a sense of safety, and recognition and celebration of efforts and achievement.	Staff and students are committed to promote change in the culture of the school, such as: caring, trust, respect, a sense of safety, and recognition and celebration of efforts and achievement.	The entire school community promotes sustained and unified efforts to take risks to embed change in the culture of the school, such as: caring, trust, respect, a sense of safety, and recognition and celebration of efforts and achievement.

Source: Hipp (2003).

APPENDIX D

ELECTRONIC SURVEY INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent Notice

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: Campus Leader and Teacher Perceptions of Campus Administrator Actions In Support of Core Content Professional Learning Communities

RESEARCH TEAM: Kristen Sommers (phone: [redacted] kristensommers@my.unt.edu), doctoral student, for completion of a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Robert Voelkel, Jr., Department of Teacher Education and Administration College of Education (phone: 940-565-4800; robert.voelkel@unt.edu).

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Taking part in this study is voluntary. The investigators will explain the study to you and will any answer any questions you might have. It is your choice whether or not you take part in this study. If you agree to participate and then choose to withdraw from the study, that is your right, and your decision will not be held against you.

You are being asked to take part in a research study that is designed to explore teacher and administrator perceptions of campus administrator actions that support PLC teams.

Your participation in this research study involves you being asked to complete a 52-item survey developed to measure the practices present on campuses that support professional learning community (PLC) practices. In addition, there are six (6) items on the survey designed to gain more information regarding your experience as an educator and your current teaching assignments. More details will be provided in the next section.

You might want to participate in this study if you would like to provide your perception of current campus practices that support campus PLCs. However, you might not want to participate in this study if you do not prefer to provide input regarding this topic or if you do not have time to complete the survey.

You may choose to participate in this research study if you are a member of a core content (English, mathematics, science, or social studies) PLC at your high school campus. This is the only eligibility criteria, so if that does not apply to you then you are not eligible to complete the survey.

The reasonable foreseeable risks or discomforts to you if you choose to take part include potential privacy/confidentiality risks similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet. There are no personal benefits for participating in this study other than sharing your perceptions that may be of benefit to campus administrators. You will not receive compensation for participation.

DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to explore teacher and campus administrator perceptions of campus administrator actions that support PLC teams. Administrators are tasked to support content-based PLC teams, but it is unclear as to what are the most effective campus administrator actions that teachers feel best support their teams.

TIME COMMITMENT: Participation in this survey is expected to take approximately 10 minutes.

STUDY PROCEDURES: The survey was developed to assess the campus practices that support PLCs. You are asked to participate in the study by completing the 52 survey items and 6 additional items to gain information regarding your experience as an educator. You may skip any questions with which you are not comfortable answering. Your answers to the survey cannot be traced back to you. You will be asked to complete this survey within a 10-day period. A reminder email will be sent on day five. The survey must be completed in one setting.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: We expect the study to benefit current and future campus administrators as they work to effectively support campus PLCs.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: Participation in this online survey involves risks to confidentiality similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet, and there is always a risk of breach of confidentiality.

Participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach in confidentiality. Study data will be physically and electronically secured by the research team. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security.

If you experience excessive discomfort when completing the research activity, you may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty. The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen, but the study may involve risks to the participant, which are currently unforeseeable. UNT does not provide medical services, or financial assistance for emotional distress or injuries that might happen from participating in this research. If you need to discuss your discomfort further or if your need is urgent, please contact a mental health provider, or the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

COMPENSATION: There is no compensation provided for participation in this survey.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Efforts will be made by the research team to keep your personal information private, including research study records, and disclosure will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored on a secure UNT server for at least three (3) years past the end of this research. The collected data will be password protected on the PI's computer and by PLC Associates, the online survey company.

Participation in this online survey involves the potential for the loss of confidentiality similar to a person's everyday use of the internet.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about you for this study may be used for future research studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB would first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to you, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records, as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and sponsors of the study.

This research uses a third-party software called plcassociates.org and is subject to the privacy policies of the software noted here: http://survey.plcassociates.org/plc/survey/admin/index.cgi?location=system_security&s=kristensommers@my.unt.edu1130143704

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about the study you may contact Dr. Robert Voelkel, Jr. at 940-565-4800 or robert.voelkel@unt.edu or Kristen Sommers at [redacted] or kristen.sommers@my.unt.edu. Any questions you have regarding your rights as a research subject, or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 940-565-4643, or by email at untirb@unt.edu.

If you choose not to participate, simply close the Internet tab to exit the survey.

☐ I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years or older and I agree to participate in this study.

APPENDIX E

TEACHER INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent for Studies with Adults

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: Campus Leader and Teacher Perceptions of Campus Administrator Actions In Support of Core Content Professional Learning Communities

RESEARCH TEAM: Kristen Sommers (phone: [redacted]; kristensommers@my.unt.edu), doctoral student, for completion of dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Robert Voelkel, Jr., Department of Teacher Education and Administration College of Education (phone: 940-565-4800; robert.voelkel@unt.edu).

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Taking part in this study is voluntary. The investigator will explain the study to you and will any answer any questions you might have. It is your choice whether or not you take part in this study. If you agree to participate and then choose to withdraw from the study, that is your right, and your decision will not be held against you.

You are being asked to take part in a research study that aims to explore campus leader and teacher perceptions of campus administrator actions in support of content-specific PLCs..

Your participation in this research study involves you participating in a one-on-one, virtual interview. The interview will consist of eight (8) interview questions and any pertinent follow-up questions. More details will be provided in the next section.

You might want to participate in this study if you would like to provide input regarding how you feel campus administrators can best support campus professional learning communities (PLCs) within core-content subject areas. However, you might not want to participate in this study if you do not prefer to provide input regarding this topic or if you do not have time to participate in the interview.

You may choose to participate in this research study if you are a member of a core content PLC at a participating high school campus. This is the only eligibility criteria, so if that does not apply to you then you are not eligible to participate in the interview.

The reasonable foreseeable risks or discomforts to you if you choose to take part include privacy/confidentiality risks. There are no personal benefits for participating in this study. You will not receive compensation for participation.

DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to explore campus administrator and teacher perceptions of administrator actions that support professional learning communities

(PLCs) for teachers in core content subjects. Administrators are tasked to support content-based PLC teams, but it is unclear what the most effective campus administrator actions are that teachers feel best support their teams.

TIME COMMITMENT: Participation in the interview for this study is expected to take approximately 45 minutes. Review of the transcribed interview (should the participant choose to do so) could take approximately 45 additional minutes.

STUDY PROCEDURES: You are asked to participate in this study by participating in a virtual one-on-one interview with the researcher which will take approximately 45 minutes. The time of the interview may be of your choosing and at your convenience. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experience with PLCs and your perspective regarding campus administrator support of core content PLC teams. I may ask follow-up or clarifying questions during the interview; however, my objective is to listen and hear your perspective. You may skip any interview questions with which you are not comfortable answering. Within two weeks of the interview, a written transcription of the audio from the interview (with your permission) will be emailed to you for your review which may take an additional 45 minutes. You may read it, add further information, and/or correct any errors or misinterpretations at that time. Your answers to the interview questions cannot be traced back to you as pseudonyms will be used for all individual and/or school information.

AUDIO/VIDEO/PHOTOGRAPHY:

☐ **I agree** to be audio recorded during the research study.

☐ **I agree** that the audio recording can be used in publications or presentations.

☐ **I do not agree** that the audio recording be used in publications or presentations.

☐ **I do not agree** to be audio recorded during the research study.

You may participate in the study if you do not agree to be audio recorded.

This research uses a third party software through Rev.com© for audio recording and transcription of the interviews and Atlas.ti© for data coding and is subject to the privacy policies of this software noted here: Rev.com©: https://www.rev.com/about/privacy and NDA; Atlas.ti: https://atlasti.com/privacy/. Interviews will be conducted virtually through Zoom. Their privacy policy can be found here: https://zoom.us/privacy. The recordings will be kept with other electronic data in a secure UNT OneDrive account for the duration of the study.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: We expect the study to benefit current and future campus administrators as they work to effectively support campus PLCs.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: This research study is not expected to pose any additional risks beyond what you would normally experience in your regular everyday life. However, if you do experience any discomfort, please inform the research team.

Participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach in confidentiality. Study data will be physically and electronically secured by the research team. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security.
If you experience excessive discomfort when completing the research activity, you may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty. The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen, but the study may involve risks to the participant, which are currently unforeseeable. UNT does not provide medical services, or financial assistance for emotional distress or injuries that might happen from participating in this research. If you need to discuss your discomfort further or if your need is urgent, please contact a mental health provider, or the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

COMPENSATION: There is no compensation provided for participation in this study. There are no alternative activities offered for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Efforts will be made by the research team to keep your personal information private, including research study records, and disclosure will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored in a secure location on the PI's password protected computer and in a locked cabinet in my office. Research records will be labeled with a pseudonym and the master key linking names with pseudonyms will be maintained in a separate and secure location.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about you for this study may be used for future research studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB would first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to you, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

Participation in this online study involves the potential for the loss of confidentiality similar to a person's everyday use of the internet. While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records, as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and sponsors of the study.

This research uses a third party software through Rev.com© for audio recording and transcription of the interviews and Atlas.ti© for data coding and is subject to the privacy policies of this software noted here: Rev.com©: https://www.rev.com/about/privacy and NDA; Atlas.ti©: https://atlasti.com/privacy/. Interviews will be conducted virtually through Zoom. Their privacy policy can be found here: https://zoom.us/privacy.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about the study you may contact Dr. Robert Voelkel, Jr. at 940-565-4800 or robert.voelkel@unt.edu or Kristen Sommers at [redacted] or kristen.sommers@my.unt.edu. Any questions you have regarding your rights as a research subject, or complaints about the

research may be directed to the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 940-565-4643, or by email at untirb@unt.edu.

CONSENT:

- Your signature below indicates that you have read, or have had read to you, all of the above.
- You confirm that you have been told the possible benefits, risks, and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study; you also understand that the study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- By signing, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Please sign below if you are at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT **DATE**

***If you agree to participate, please provide a signed copy of this form to the researcher team. They will provide you with a copy to keep for your records.**

APPENDIX F

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part I: Background

1. I'd like to start by hearing about your background and how you came into your current teaching position at [School Name]. Please tell me about your teaching experience: How long have you been a teacher and in how many different school districts or schools within this district? (background)

2. Please describe your experiences with PLC teams including your previous and current PLC team(s). (background)

3. My understanding that you all have been working in PLCs for quite some time here at [School Name]. Please describe your understanding of the purpose of PLCs here at [School name]. (Probe for goals and then expectations.)

Part II: PLC Practices and Supports

4. Please describe any resources/structures/processes/procedures at your campus that you feel are helpful and supportive of your PLC team(s). Why do you perceive these as supportive? Who initiates/ed the implementation of these supports?

5. Please describe a recent PLC meeting that you participated in where a campus administrator was present? During that meeting:

    a. What was the focus of the meeting? (probe for grade level, subject area, particular topic of discussion)

    b. What was the team working on?

    c. What resources did the team use during this time? What seemed to support your work?

    d. What did the campus administrator do during the meeting?

    e. Was there anything effective the campus administrator did to support the PLC team during the meeting? Was there anything you wish the administrator would have done to better support the team?

    f. Is what you just described typical for your PLC whether or not your administrator is present? Please explain.

6. What do you think is the purpose of an administrator attending PLC team meetings? (probe for compliance vs. supportive role/resource)

    a. Would you prefer to have your administrator participate more or less often or in a different manner (not just amount but how they participate)? (probe for things the administrators are doing that are helpful or distracting) Why?

7. What are three (or more) specific behaviors or actions you would like to see from your campus administrator that you believe would be helpful to your PLC team. Why do you believe these would be helpful?

Part III: Closure

8. Is there anything else regarding administrators' actions in terms of supporting PLC teams that you would like to add?

APPENDIX G

CAMPUS ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent for Studies with Adults

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: Campus Leader and Teacher Perceptions of Campus Administrator Actions In Support of Core Content Professional Learning Communities

RESEARCH TEAM: Kristen Sommers (phone: [redacted]; kristensommers@my.unt.edu), doctoral student, for completion of dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Robert Voelkel, Jr., Department of Teacher Education and Administration College of Education (phone: 940-565-4800; robert.voelkel@unt.edu).

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Taking part in this study is voluntary. The investigators will explain the study to you and will any answer any questions you might have. It is your choice whether or not you take part in this study. If you agree to participate and then choose to withdraw from the study, that is your right, and your decision will not be held against you.

You are being asked to take part in a research study that aims to explore campus leader and teacher perceptions of campus administrator actions in support of core content PLCs.

Your participation in this research study involves you participating in a one-on-one, virtual interview. The interview will consist of fifteen (15) interview questions and any pertinent follow-up questions. More details will be provided in the next section.

You might want to participate in this study if you would like to provide input regarding actions you take to support campus professional learning community (PLC) teams within core content subject areas. However, you might not want to participate in this study if you do not prefer to provide input regarding this topic or if you do not have time to participate in the interview.

You may choose to participate in this research study if you are a campus administrator at a participating high school campus who has knowledge of and who supports core content PLC teams. This is the only eligibility criteria, so if that does not apply to you then you are not eligible to participate in the interview.

The reasonable foreseeable risks or discomforts to you if you choose to take part include privacy/confidentiality risks. There are no personal benefits for participating in this survey. You will not receive compensation for participation.

DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to explore campus administrator and teacher perceptions of administrator actions that support professional learning communities (PLCs) for teachers in core content subjects. Administrators are tasked to support content-based PLC teams, but it is unclear what the most effective campus administrator actions are that teachers feel best support their teams.

TIME COMMITMENT: Participation in the interview for this study is expected to take approximately one hour. Review of the transcribed interview (should the participant choose to do so) could take approximately 45 additional minutes.

STUDY PROCEDURES: You are asked to participate in this study by participating in a virtual one-on-one interview with the researcher which will take approximately one hour. The date and time of the interview may be of your choosing and at your convenience. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your professional background (teaching and administrative) and your perspective regarding campus administrator support of core content PLC teams. I may ask follow-up or clarifying questions during the interview; however, my objective is to listen and hear your perspective. You may skip any interview questions with which you are not comfortable answering. Within two weeks of the interview, a written transcription of the audio from the interview (with your permission) will be emailed to you for your review which may take an additional 45 minutes. You may read it, add further information, and/or correct any errors or misinterpretations at that time. Your answers to the interview questions cannot be traced back to you as pseudonyms will be used for all individual and/or school information.

AUDIO/VIDEO/PHOTOGRAPHY:

☐ **I agree** to be audio recorded during the research study.

☐ **I agree** that the audio recording can be used in publications or presentations.

☐ **I do not agree** that the audio recording be used in publications or presentations.

☐ **I do not agree** to be audio recorded during the research study.

You may participate in the study if you do not agree to be audio recorded.

This research uses a third party software through Rev.com© for audio recording and transcription of the interviews and Atlas.ti© for data coding and is subject to the privacy policies of this software noted here: Rev.com©: https://www.rev.com/about/privacy and NDA; Atlas.ti: https://atlasti.com/privacy/. Interviews will be conducted virtually through Zoom. Their privacy policy can be found here: https://zoom.us/privacy. The recordings will be kept with other electronic data in a secure UNT OneDrive account for the duration of the study.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: We expect the study to benefit current and future campus administrators as they work to effectively support campus PLCs.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: This research study is not expected to pose any

additional risks beyond what you would normally experience in your regular everyday life. However, if you do experience any discomfort, please inform the research team. Participation in this online study involves risks to confidentiality similar to a person's everyday use of the internet and that there is always a risk of breach of confidentiality. Participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach in confidentiality. Study data will be physically and electronically secured by the research team. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security.

If you experience excessive discomfort when completing the research activity, you may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty. The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen, but the study may involve risks to the participant, which are currently unforeseeable. UNT does not provide medical services, or financial assistance for emotional distress or injuries that might happen from participating in this research. If you need to discuss your discomfort further or if your need is urgent, please contact a mental health provider, or the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

COMPENSATION: There is no compensation provided for participation in this survey. There are no alternative activities offered for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Efforts will be made by the research team to keep your personal information private, including research study records, and disclosure will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored in a secure location on the PI's password protected computer and in a locked cabinet in the PI's office. Research records will be labeled with a pseudonym and the master key linking names with pseudonyms will be maintained in a separate and secure location. Participation in this online study involves the potential for the loss of confidentiality similar to a person's everyday use of the internet.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about you for this study may be used for future research studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB would first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to you, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records, as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and sponsors of the study.

This research uses a third party software through Rev.com© for audio recording and transcription of the interviews and Atlas.ti© for data coding and is subject to the privacy policies of this software noted here: Rev.com©: https://www.rev.com/about/privacy and NDA; Atlas.ti©: https://atlasti.com/privacy/. Interviews will be conducted virtually through Zoom. Their privacy policy can be found here: https://zoom.us/privacy.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about the study you may contact Dr. Robert Voelkel, Jr. at 940-565-4800 or robert.voelkel@unt.edu or Kristen Sommers at [redacted] or kristen.sommers@my.unt.edu. Any questions you have regarding your rights as a research subject, or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 940-565-4643, or by email at untirb@unt.edu.

University of North Texas
IRB-20-610
Approved on 1-10-2021

CONSENT:

- Your signature below indicates that you have read, or have had read to you, all of the above.
- You confirm that you have been told the possible benefits, risks, and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study; you also understand that the study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- By signing, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Please sign below if you are at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT **DATE**

***If you agree to participate, please provide a signed copy of this form to the researcher team. They will provide you with a copy to keep for your records.**

APPENDIX H

CAMPUS ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part I: Background

1. I'd like to start by hearing about your background and how you came into your current position at [School Name]. Please tell me about your teaching experience: How long were you a teacher and in how many different school districts? Did you teach in Hilltop ISD? (background)

2. Please tell me about your current position. How long have you been in your current role? What are your primary responsibilities?

3. In your role as [title], what would you say are your primary goals for the school? How does building the leadership capacity of your staff play into this?

Part II: PLC Vision and Practices

4. As you know, this study is looking at the role of administrators' actions that support PLC teams. Please tell me about what PLCs look like here at [School Name]?

5. What purpose do you see PLCs serving at [school name]? When you described your goal of [previously stated goal in Q3], how do you see PLCs supporting that goal? Why or why not?

6. I'm curious about your particular role as it relates to professional learning communities. How would you describe your role? What are some of your goals and priorities for time spent with PLCs?

7. Please describe a recent PLC meeting that you attended/participated in? During that meeting:

    a. What was the focus of the meeting? (Probe for grade level, subject area, particular topic of discussion)

    b. What were teachers working on?

    c. What resources were teachers using during this time? What seemed to support their work?

    d. What was your role during that time? (Probe for specific actions they took during that meeting)

8. When you were a teacher, were you part of PLC teams? If so, please describe any ways in which you think this may impact the way you work with PLC teams as an administrator.

9. What do you see as supports for PLCs here at [school name]? (probe for resources, facilities, communication systems, relationships present at the school).

    a. For one of these supports, what's an example of how this has been used by teachers and why do you think it's been supportive?

    b. What do you think might be missing? Or where might teachers need more support? Why?

10. We're going to switch gears a little bit and talk about some specific aspects that may contribute to the culture of a campus. How are some of your efforts (and thus the school staff and students' efforts) aligned to support the values and vision of the campus?

11. How do you work to build leadership capacity in others here at [School Name]?

12. What opportunities do your staff members have to be involved in professional learning opportunities? (Probe for frequency of these opportunities, who conducts or presents them, and how the topics are chosen)

13. How do teachers share their practices with others here at [School Name]?

Part III: Closure

14. Given you had all the time and resources at your disposal, what are 3 leadership actions you wish you could implement in support of your PLC teams?

15. Is there anything additional that you would like to share regarding how you support PLC teams at this campus?

APPENDIX I

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS MATRIX

Artifact	Supportive and shared leadership	Shared values and vision	Collective learning and application	Shared personal practice	Supportive conditions

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